Chapter Three

Kite-less Afghan Skies

Introduction

Following a similar structure as the Sri Lankan chapter, this chapter would move from tracing the history and phases of the Afghan conflicts to the portrayal of the exiled subjects in the novels of Hosseini and Rahimi. The ensuing analysis first studies the literal exilic perspectives and positions from where the different phases of the Afghan wars are viewed in *The Kite Runner* and *Earth and Ashes*. It then moves on to a study of the metaphorical exilic perspective in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Earth and Ashes* and concludes with a brief study of Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed*. This intertextual comparison grouping is retained in the sections on the portrayal of the armed conflict. The chapter studies the use of allegory and the personal ordeal in *The Kite Runner* and *Earth and Ashes*, to narrate the seminal events. It also examines the battle of the unarmed woman in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone*, against institutions that legitimise and validate war. The chapter discusses the texts’ privileging of the margins of the conflict over its centre to challenge totalizing theocratic state’s impositions on ethnic minorities and the woman.

I

The Many Phases of the Afghan Wars

Rare is the country that has suffered as many ordeals, and such relentless ordeals at that, as has Afghanistan since its foundation as a political unit in 1747. Distinct from the Sri Lankan conflict in many ways, the varied phases of the Afghan wars were fought on a landscape manifestly dissimilar from the Sri Lankan panorama. The harsh, mountainous, landlocked country of Afghanistan stands at the midway mark of the ancient Silk Road connecting China and India to the Middle East and Europe. Amin Saikal in his “Introduction” *Modern Afghanistan*, suggests that its critical geostrategic location has been coveted by a never-ending stream of foreign interlopers, from Alexander the Great to the generals of Soviet Russia and the United States. This and other factor have led to it being the only country in the world that has experienced military occupation/ intervention in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first centuries by Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States respectively(1).
If the Sri Lankan war challenged univocal interpretation, the Afghan wars defy univocal definition blurring the lines between ideological wars and identity wars, civil wars and Islamic fundamentalism, between being the theatre of the Cold War and neo-colonial wars on terror. Afghanistan throughout its development into its present state has lacked a unified nationalist and patriotic idea. Anthony Hyman observes that internally divided along the lines of ethnicity and tribe, each ethnic/tribal group holds on to its rival ideas of nation. This factor has contributed to the whirlpool of the Afghan conflicts (300-308). Hyman and other scholars like Thomas Barfield and Michael Rubin comment on this ethnic, tribal and linguistic diversity. They observe that the Pashto and Persian speaking Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group within the country. Said to be descendants of Qais; they occupy the South, East, Kunar and the Northwest Frontier Province. The ethnic Persian speaking, Tajiks comprise one-fourth of the population of which the many urbanite Tajiks live in Kabul, Herat and Mazar but a large number live in the mountains of the Northeast. The Hazaras, the historic victims of prejudice on racial and religious grounds, (a detail that forms the linchpin of The Kite Runner) represent another nineteen percent. Historically belonging to Hazarajat, Hazaras are Shia Muslims who are ranked lowest in the Afghan ethnic hierarchy. Other marginal groups include Aimaks, Turkmen, Baluchis and Zeks. Rubin further notes how linguistic divisions parallel and in some cases overlap ethnic divisions. Dari (the language in which Earth and Ashes is written); an Afghan dialect of Persian is the lingua franca of half the population. The other major language is Pashto while some minority groups speak Turkic languages like Uzbek and Turkmen. Tribal, sub tribal and clan divisions compound the Afghan vortex contributing to the already intense rivalries and division (Barfield 301-304; Rubin 3-5).

While scholars like Hyman and Barfield point out how during the centuries of rulership by the Pashtun Kings, the people were subjected to the internal colonialism by the elite Pashtuns, Amin Saikal in his “Introduction” adds that outside intervention further weakened already feeble domestic structures. Thus the polygamic rivalries within the successive royal families together with major power rivalries between Britain and Russia initially, and then following the Second World War between the U.S.A and the U.S.S.R. and contention between regional groups, generated a vicious cycle with each feeding off the other( Hyman 304; Barfield 301-304 and Saikal 10). Saikal in his “Introduction” succinctly sums up the national reasons that escalated the conflict to its twenty first century character. “As successive rulers failed to harness national unity, institutionalize politics, incorporate moderate Islam into a culturally relevant ideology of state-building and modernization, there emerged sharp
tensions between communism and Islamism, from the 1960s to the 1980s and moderate Islam and regressive Islamic medievalism in the 1990s” (11).

However despite the assassination of Zahir Shah’s father in 1933 and Daoud’s coup in 1973, Afghanistan enjoyed half a century (1929–1978) of relative peace and accommodation between the central government and the tribes. The thirty years of war began with the Saur Revolution when the internally divided Communist Party PDPA executed Daoud and his entire family in the lunar month of Saur. Following which the Communist government threw caution to the wind and immediately proclaimed a secular socialist government that tried to force far-reaching land reforms and push programmes to better the status of women. The ethnic tribes rebelled, the regime was about to collapse, and so the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 to save socialism. The radical reforms were rescinded, but the Soviet occupation generated even greater tribal resistance.

The Afghan-Soviet war started as an effort by the Soviet Union to maintain a satellite regime. It became a Cold War when the United States funded, organized and equipped the Afghan insurgents resisting the Soviet Forces. Further when Washington welcomed without any moral qualms the deployment of Islam as an ideology of resistance to Soviet occupation it exacerbated the festering Islam vs. the West binary. For one the call to jihad brought in Muslim volunteers from around the world, together with financial and logistical support from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States. And as Scott Atran points out the Mujahedeen fought primarily to defend their faith and community against a hostile ideology, an oppressive government, and a foreign invader (343). Huntington further notes that the Soviet defeat was different things to different factions of the war: for the Western Bloc it was the Waterloo of the Cold War but for the Mujahedeen it was resistance to a foreign power that was not based on either nationalist or socialist principles but on religious principles. It was waged as jihad and it gave tremendous boost to Islamic self-confidence and power (246-247). While this is one interpretation of history, the coexistence of multiple interpretations of the same history, makes historians like Hayden White see historical narrative as simply a structure imposed by the historian on a pre-narrativised past. In such plural interpretations, although the impact of Islamic resurgence together with American technology and Saudi money leading to the Soviet defeat cannot be discounted, it is also vital to consider America’s role in factors that led to the entry of the extremist Islamic militia – the Taliban into Afghanistan politics.

In supporting the Mujahedeen the United States confined its support to the main groups, drawn from the Pakistan based Sunni Muslims and deliberately avoided any action...
that could possibly help the Iranian based Shiite Mujahedeen. In close alliance with Pakistan’s military intelligence, the CIA trained and armed not only thousands of Afghans but also hundreds of Muslims from Pakistan and the Arab world to join the jihad against the Soviet. Once the Soviets left, America turned a blind eye to Pakistan’s establishment in 1994 of the highly medievalist, discriminating fanatic Islamic armed force, the Taliban and its anti-human rights policies. It chose to pay scant attention to the anti-Taliban Islamist leader; Ahmed Shah Massoud’s warning that a dangerous and unprecedented alliance was developing between the Al-Qaeda and the non-Arab groups with the full patronage of Pakistan’s ISI. And so on September 11, 2001 Afghanistan once again became the focus of the international community.

America through its war on Terror discourse had constructed itself as what Edward Said calls in his article “a sleeping giant” rather than a superpower almost constantly at war, or in some sort of conflict, all over the Islamic domains. “In this drum beating of America”, Said adds “Manichaean symbols and apocalyptic scenarios are banded about with future consequences and rhetorical restraint thrown to the winds”. “Osama bin Laden’s name and face”, he comments “have become so numbingly familiar to Americans as in effect to obliterate any history he and his shadowy followers might have had before they became stock symbols of everything loathsome and hateful to the collective imagination” (The Observer, Sep 19th, 2001). Condemnable and repugnant as the practices of the Taliban and the terrorism of Al-Qaeda were, it is important to consider America’s entrenching its bombing of Afghanistan (when the Taliban refused to hand over Bin Laden) in its twenty first century narrative of Islamic Fundamentalism. Amin Saikal “Islam and the West”, comments on the pejorative usage of the term in order to disparage and discredit the Islamic community in general as an irrational, irresponsible and extremist force, as dedicated to international terrorism and therefore liable to global suppression and isolation (20-21). He adds the Islamic world, on the other hand sees the U.S. as the “cold warrior” realists who have deliberately fabricated the notion of an “Islamic threat” to serve the one purpose of maintaining Western superiority and hegemony over the Muslim world (20-21). Thus America’s treatise of jihad and fundamentalism is met by the Islamic world’s westoxication rhetoric. Recommending the need for “bridges of understanding and trust as a basis for a new equitable world”, Saikal comments that it is these contexts and motives, i.e the tapping of anti-American grievances, to galvanize support, that have led to emergence of Bin Laden and the Taliban regrouping and forming shadow nations in many parts of Afghanistan (31-32).
Since 9/11 Afghanistan and its war ravaged terrain has been the site on which much literary works have been produced by both Afghans and non-Afghans. If the world changed after 9/11, literature also changed. Anyone writing after that event was shaped and informed by the event. Writings that come from a non-Afghan space have often conflated the particularities of Afghanistan with a rather univocal understanding of Islam leading to what Ramanan calls a “demonizing of Islam” (126). Ramanan especially observes how American and British authors like Don de Lillo, John Updike and Ian McEwan, in their attempts to tackle jihadist terror, resort to underscoring Islamophobia, offer pseudo-Islamic scholarship as justification (127-130). Other writers like Mohsin Hamid and Naqvi, discussed in Chapter-1 narrativise other issues in this context. Raman adds that if 9/11 led to the creation of the “new other”, it also led writers to revisit the origins of the conflict in Afghanistan to explore its present avatar (128)

A surge of Life Writings by women from Afghanistan, are subjective and emotional responses to repressive fundamentalist regimes in Afghanistan. Autobiographies like Latifa’s, My Forbidden Face, Sulima and Hala’s Behind the Burqa carry the burden of speaking for so many whose life stories are shaped by a series of invasion and conquests in Afghanistan since 1973. Gillian Whitlock suggests the use of burqa as a powerful rhetorical strategy, to suggest the discipline of views imposed by the gender apartheid of the Taliban. From the confined recesses of the burqa we can attend to the experience of loss, grief and dispossession (45-47). Speaking from behind the veil they unveil ravages of their life pillaged and wreaked havoc by decades of war. War entered their lives, Whitlock comments either through brothers, fathers and husbands who join the Mujahedin’s to fight the Soviets and return as “martyrs” or through the Taliban that brought its purging of “Westoxicated” Afghanistan into the homes of these women (48). However Whitlock also comments how the West has hijacked these representations, capitalising on the haunting sight of the burqa as propaganda to represent and justify west’s military intervention in the name of saving the Afghan woman from the Afghan man, reductively stereotyped in the figure of the Taliban- the Pakistan Madrasa trained Arab. She especially notes the West’s generalising in often clubbing narratives of Iraqi women and other Middle Eastern texts with the Afghan space (60-69)

While such works are about and located within Afghanistan, it is also important to note that the nature of the silenced stories that are recovered, make these narratives possible only in exile. Further while many of these women choose pseudonyms, some writings are oral testimonies made into written texts by non-Afghans. Thus while literalizing their ordeal arms them, the perils of disclosure of their identity is a menacing reality. Accordingly the
unveiling of terror regimes itself happens behind veils that empower the undisclosed discloser.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan born (today claimed as) a popular Afghan-American novelist. Born in 1965, he left Afghanistan in 1976 and after a four year stay in Paris reached the States in 1980. Since 1980, shortly after the start of the Soviet War, he has been in the United States. His three novels The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns and the recent And the Mountains Echoed have catapulted him into worldwide fame. Though a doctor by qualification, he took to writing as a profession after the success of his first novel. His narratives take place in Afghanistan during the Civil War, during the 1990s, the Soviet War, Talibanisation, and so on. He states that they are made of “a composite of vignettes and stories that I've heard from Afghanistan during that era, either from Afghans in exile who came from there and then told their stories here or from my own trips to Afghanistan since 2003” (Interview with Goodreads). During his visits to Afghanistan in his official capacity with the United Nations Refugee Agency, he says in the interview “I had a chance to sit down with people from all walks of life and hear the stories of what life exactly was like ...militia warfare was destroying Kabul, when the Taliban came, ...when the Soviets were in Afghanistan”. These are the accounts that he uses, he states to kind of provide a, “Hopefully, convincing, believable background to my stories”.

Speaking about his “survivor guilt” in the same interview he states, “I'm maybe the most fortunate person coming from the least fortunate place. I really am”. Comparing himself with one of the character in And the Mountains Echoed, the young doctor who goes back to Kabul with his cousin he comments about his being caught between the need to belong to Afghanistan yet the strong sense of alienation he feels there. In the interview he comments,

“For both he and I there's a tremendous sense of homecoming when the plane approaches Kabul and I can see the city spread out beneath me. ...And walking on the streets down there, I look like those people and I know their language ...but there's no question that I'm an outsider... because I don't have the whiff of all those experiences that they've had. ...the life I have is just sheer luck, the genetic lottery—that I was born to this particular family and I happened to be able to leave the country.

Elaborating the point of view he adopts in his books, he notes “my perspective is that of the Afghani exile” He also adds that if he had written staying in Afghanistan his “book would have read very, very differently, because it would have been a radically different
perspective”. His perspective he summarises, is “that of the person who left and it will always be touched by that, it will always be marked by my distance to Afghanistan, so that will be both my asset and my drawback”. From this perspective he writes to clear the West’s perception of Afghanistan and also to clear the misconception that the Afghans see the American presence as an invasion. Though he concedes that there are grievances against some of the things the troops have done. He is currently a Goodwill Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and has been working to provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan through the Khaled Hosseini Foundation. The concept for the foundation was inspired by his trip to Afghanistan in 2007 with UNHCR.

Atiq Rahimi was born in 1962 in Kabul to a senior public servant. Following the Soviet invasion; Rahimi fled Afghanistan and took refuge first in India, travelling the country for a year. After being sent back to Afghanistan in 1984, he left Afghanistan clandestinely, having walked nine days and nine nights and took refuge in Pakistan. In 1985, he relocated to France after receiving political asylum there. In his interview with Fowler, Rahimi states that Earth and Ashes were his words of mourning for his brother who died when the Taliban took power in Afghanistan. He adds that his father was like the old man, Dastaguir who could not meet his son Murad to tell him about the destruction of their village. His book springs from his question to his father: “Why they didn’t talk to me about my brother’s death for two years?”

Speaking about his position as an exile and the multiple losses it entailed, he states in the interview,

My home was in the dark of terror, the dark of war… the darkness of fundamentalism, darkness everywhere. And there in my house, I lost the key to my identity, my liberty, the key to my independence. So I went somewhere where there was light, where there was liberty, where there was independence. France. And I was looking for my key. But of course I could not find it because I left it in my country. But I created it in my imagination. Writing about Afghanistan is like creating my key. …When I am in France, I am an Afghan. When I am in Afghanistan, I am French.

Today an active film director, photographer and creative advisor for many media companies, Rahimi has won several significant literary awards for his books and his movies. The Patience Stone for instance won the prestigious French literary Prix Goncourt
award. Some of Rahimi’s other works translated in English include *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* (2007) and *Dostoevsky’s Curse*.

One can locate Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* and *Thousand Splendid Suns*, and Atiq Rahimi’s *Earth and Ashes* and *The Patience Stone* within the different phases of the Afghan wars. In the Afghan framework of the chosen texts, unlike the frontline depiction of armed conflict as seen in the Sri Lankan context, the texts foreground the lives of non-combatant victims through the foregrounding of their private lives in the milieu of war; the texts thus personalize the universal war.

**II**

**The immigrant-emigrant, Amir:**

The First Person retrospective narrative of *The Kite Runner* begins in exile. By the time Amir, the Pashtun protagonist of the text begins his narrative in his host land, America, he seems to be a well settled immigrant novelist in America, as the retrospective narrative later makes it evident. But Rahim Khan’s call acts like the 1946, black and white photograph in Rushdie’s “Imaginary Homelands”, reminding Amir that the past is still “home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (9). Orm Overland differentiates between the words “immigrant” and “emigrant” and states how the former speaks of entry – going into and settling in another country- while the latter, speaks of departure (7-8). Amir’s retrospective narrative that commences in December 2001 locates him as a hyphenated immigrant-emigrant. The former, for he states, “San Francisco, the city I now call home” (*The Kite Runner*1), the latter as he is still in Overland’s words “pre-occupied with his homeland as it was”, and by the end of the novel “the homeland as it has become” (8). Haunted by a sense of multiple losses- people, rituals and places, Amir attempts to reclaim through his imagination and nostalgia a lost past; Afghans of the mind.

This reflection of the exile becomes literalized in the mirror, in chapter two, with which the analeptical reconstruction of the homeland begins. Rushdie compares the imaginary homeland of the exile to a broken mirror some of whose fragments have been “irretrievably lost” (11). Though, the mirror in the novel, is not a broken one, it nevertheless reflects fragments of “home” that have been “irretrievably lost” - Ali, Hassan, Baba, the idyllic Kabul of the 1970’s, a moment in the winter of 1975 and in the process a part of Amir himself. It is in an attempt to reconstruct this broken home that Amir returns twice to his homeland once through memory, a second time on a Pakistani airline, in the 1990s to the Taliban ravaged Afghanistan. The mirror is an important symbol signifying that the narrative
recall is not just retrospective but introspective as well, that this nostalgic reconstruction is also multiple memo-realizations.

The childhood memory of Amir especially of himself and Hassan, the Hazara boyservant- (later) – half-brother, begins with Amir’s description of his ancestral home in Kabul. Hosseini establishes several things through the intricate description of the opulence and carefully selected grandeur of the house. Amir’s Pashtun, elite class position is immediately made apparent, but the house is also a metonymy for the Afghanistan of the mind. Through what Jayasuriya in the Sri Lankan calls the, “counter imagination” of the exile, Amir creates a pre-conflict home/land of poplar trees, when artifacts from Iran and India could effortlessly cross the Afghan threshold, and uninhibited discussions of soccer and politics could overflow in smoking rooms, things that rapidly departed the land once the wars began (108). Yet even before Amir is exiled to America during the Soviet occupation, he is displaced from this ancestral home by the hegemonic male figure – his father, Baba.

If the absence of parental figures creates a sense of rootlessness and alienation within his home, the presence of Hassan accentuates it further. Unaware of Baba’s rather distorted and convoluted way of righting his wrong to Hassan (Baba’s illegitimate offspring) Amir is jealous of Hassan’s achievement and the attention he receives from Baba, despite the bond the boys share. Further he has a faint doubt that Baba prefers Hassan to him. More masculine in the way Baba wishes Amir was, Hassan can flip stones better, defend Amir from the neighborhood bullies-departments in which Amir himself fails. These multiple causes coalesce to dislodge Amir, challenging his identity in complex ways that will lead in composite manners to his multifarious betrayals.

Within his estranging home, Amir’s relationship with Rahim Khan, his father’s friend, gives Amir a sense of authenticity and individuality, particularly through the latter’s recognition of and attention to Amir’s hidden creativity at many points in the text. The childhood relationship also proleptically forestalls Rahim Khan’s call imparting to Amir that “There was a way to be good again” (The Kite Runner2). If in these early sections the text portrays types of masculinities to suggest Amir’s alienation, these very same masculinities re-emerge in another form once the many conflicts begin.

The exile Nayar comments holds on to a tradition “in a nearly desperate effort to retain/ reclaim their original culture, through the reclamation of customs and culinary practices” (195). For Amir in the novel and through him for Hosseini, kite flying, almost a national culture in Afghanistan before the Taliban banned it, becomes a means of holding on to one’s customs and cultural codes. The centrality the custom has to the text almost makes it
a ritual. By way of this ritual, Amir (and to a greater extent Hosseini) seek what Nayyar calls a “cultural citizenship” within their community (195). David Sahar points out how before the war Gudiparan Bazi, the art of kite flying was an important aspect of the Afghan culture. Not merely a recreation it was a matter of honour, involving cutting the other kites to decide the lone, best kite flier (2-4). In many Afghan writings kite flying is an important symbol that narrativises a pre-conflict Afghanistan of peace, sports and pastimes. Latifa in her autobiography *My Forbidden Face mourning* the years of war, where rockets and missiles have replaced the kites in the Afghan skies, states “poor little Afghans, poor country…the billowing kites suited it so well” (151).

For Amir the custom is also a rite de passage to gain the admiration of Baba, thence admission into the masculine domain that his father valorises and from which he is excluded. It is in fact Baba who slips the key to this admission, enabled through kites. For as the text states “Kites were the one paper thin slice of intersection between” those spherical binaries Amir and Baba occupied (*The Kite Runner* 49). Chapters six and seven the pivotal chapters of the novel, elaborate this national ritual akin to a war. In a nostalgic account, the text portrays the Afghan winters, the kite tournaments, the slashing of the kite, till the lone kite remains and finally the most important convention- running the kite down. Though Amir wins the tournament like a true Agha, the said re-territorializing into his home, aka his father’s affection and tenderness, is never accomplished, for Amir is forever exiled from his sense of self when he inertly and mutely watches Hassan sodomised by Asef in a dark alley “that winter of 1975.” (*The Kite Runner*, 1)

Unable to live with the guilt, Amir voluntarily dispossesses Hassan and Ali of their home- the meager shack. However once he does this- in the story five years later, in the narrative, immediately- Amir himself is evicted from Afghanistan, his Pashtun opulence, his ancestral home and rendered homeless with the coming of the Soviets. Like Anthony Dasan and Nesakumaran, Baba’s reasons for departure once the Soviets occupy Afghanistan is not made explicit, owing to the limited first person perspective of Amir. Belonging to the first wave of exiles leaving Afghanistan in 1979, Baba perhaps anticipates the war and the instability it would broker or perchance the Marxist occupation is a threat to upper class Pashtuns like Baba. Whatever be the reasons, exile is a great leveler, for Baba and Amir are compelled to leave like Ali and Hassan. Baba who had been the builder, the planner and the achiever, his life is now summed up in “the two suitcases and the one disappointing son” (*The Kite Runner*, 108).
All expelled-escapades happen furtively and surreptitiously. Amir and Baba leave like Dasan and Nesakumaran in trucks and fuel tanks, with Amir retching and suffocating in this tortuous journey, which they all but survive. They also carry with them an Afghan “tool box”, a series of objects retrieved from the lost patria. These are also fragments of narratives, like the paintings depicting public grandeur and private marital joys, or private treasures like Rahim Khan’s gift to Amir Baba literalizes this when he empties his snuff box and fills it with his homeland’s soil, thus carrying fragments of his *watan* - slivers that painfully idolize an Afghanistan as a sacred symbol in his memory and imagination-an Afghanistan, which can perhaps only exist in what Rushdie in his “Imaginary Homeland identifies as the “broken pots of antiquity”, scarred as the nation would for evermore be with wars and warlords (12).

Exile transforms Baba and Amir and their relationship in manifold ways. Having been in Rushdie’s words“borne across” to Freemont, Amir is transcreated in the process, Baba trans-fixed in imaginary homelands, once uprooted, pines and withers away(17). Though Baba maintains the national myth of the American dream and embodies the images of masculine power, he does not identify as an American but maintains his identity as Afghan, hence is rendered powerless. Since his main frame of reference in thinking about his identity is still Afghanistan, he is unable to integrate into American society with the same status he once held. He is actively resistant to accepting his position as a disempowered immigrant. As evident in their visit to an official who assesses their eligibility for government support and offers Baba food stamps. Baba’s refusal to accept financial assistance, though sensational and theatrical, is one of the ways in which he resists an identity of dependence and powerlessness. Ironically, his loss of power in America is symbolized through physical deterioration and ultimately through being diagnosed with cancer.

In contrast to Baba’s difficulty with integration and his loss of power, Amir flourishes in his new life. The troubled relationship which Amir and Baba shared in Afghanistan during Amir’s childhood also becomes one of mutual respect and closeness in America. The father and son can finally connect because there is a shift in the relationship of power between the two characters, where Amir’s skills as a writer become valuable and where Baba no longer has the ability to use his family name to gain success. Since Baba is no longer the incarnation of the ideals of masculinity through money and influence, Amir no longer feels disempowered in Baba’s once-overwhelming masculine presence. Amir is able to adopt this position in America since he subscribes to the requisites of integration into American society: he pursues studies in English at University when his father refuses to take lessons in the language, and he accepts the mores of American society where his father protests and tries to
hold on to aspects of Afghan life. This can be seen in Baba’s violent conflict with shop owners who demand an ID from him before allowing him to use a check as payment. Baba’s difficulty with adjusting to American life is echoed by Amir’s father-in-law, General Taheri, who is another symbol of masculine power through his link to wealth and the military. Grant Andrews observes that the General also supposes that, sooner or later, Afghanistan would be freed, the monarchy restored, and his services would once again be called upon (14).

Grant Andrews goes on to observe that the novel shows almost no consciousness of the way in which Afghanistan and the expatriate characters are viewed within the American society which they are surrounded by. “For the characters in The Kite Runner, more so for Amir (who associates strongly with America), the Afghan subculture becomes the main point of identification” (15). Interactions with non-Afghan Americans are scarce throughout the novel, highlighting a sense of exclusion for this Afghan community from broader American society and constructing them as outsiders. Amir’s identification as American is possible because he achieves his American dream and he appropriates its main symbol of power, economic success.

Andrews also observes “having lived in a version of the exclusive American dream within Afghanistan, made possible through Baba’s Pashtun wealth, Amir is able to easily assimilate into America”. In this assimilation he represents American society “with seemingly no gatekeepers and no ethno cultural discrimination” (16). Later when he returns to Afghanistan, to his Afghan driver Farid he proliferates an affirmative depiction of America as a utopian cornucopia. This idealised version of American life is clearly constructed as a counter to the impoverishment of Afghanistan. Even when he gives glimpses of the disempowered state of the immigrant outsider in American society like the Afghan surgeon who runs a hot dog stand in Harvard or Baba’s impoverishment despite his unrelenting belief in the American dream and hard work, he does it fleetingly and without reflection on how these examples place his mythology of America at question.

However, Amir’s, the neo-colonial–mimic-man-of-sorts, rather simplistic identification with America is convoluted by the continuation of the Afghan subculture in Freemont, California. As Andrews remarks, regardless of his capacity to live the American dream, this subculture serves to exemplify that he is not easily incorporated into the broader American society, but needs to be part of a reproduced adaptation of Afghanistan in order to feel a sense of belonging. The one-dimensional legend of America as a place of independence and bounty which Amir offers is also destabilized by the fact that most of the Afghan expatriates – including the masculine ideal embodied through Baba – do not accomplish this
same American dream and require vending goods at a flea market in Freemont. Andrews comments that though the Flea market demonstrates the disempowered position of Afghan exiles within American society. In this way the novel complicates Amir’s naive view of America. Andrews also adds that even though the overriding narrative is still one of an all-encompassing and idealized America, this mythology is disconcerted by the subsistence of this subculture (16).

When Amir returns to Afghanistan, he is like Anil, the migrant – alien in his own country. Since in his proleptical re-location in America, he was not accosted with hostility or problems of assimilation the strategies of survival, agency, adapting to new circumstances now emerge in his encounter with Afghanistan in the 1990s. Contrasts and comparisons abound, unlike the all-embracing America, Afghanistan becomes more distant and exclusionary, a place which Amir no longer sees as home as he says to his driver Farid, “I feel like a tourist in my own country” (The Kite Runner203). He also needs external talismans like the ‘pakol’ and the artificial “chest length beard” to be seen as the insider and to camouflage his outsiderly status. Amir disapproves of these artificialities to what he sees as the inauthentic nature of belonging, as they are representations of a homogenous Afghan identity which he objects to. His condemnation can be compared to Changez Khan’s beard in Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist. Changez’s beard in post 9/11 America is an assertion of an excluded “othered” identity. Grant Andrews comments that Amir’s reluctance towards these exhibits of belonging is allied to the fact that he no longer feels like he belongs in Afghanistan (21). This opinion though partially true lacks moderation for Amir while resting in Farid’s house on his first night at Kabul feels a strong sense of rootedness and love for his homeland(The Kite Runner210-211). However Afghanistan is no longer the same- diesel smells replace “kabob” fragrances poplar and pomegranate trees have been substituted by rubbles and dust and Afghanistan is now ruled by “those who thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a thumb they don’t even understand” (The Kite Runner15). With Baba’s prophecy coming true, Afghanistan for Amir has become a place, as the author Siba Shakib calls it “where God only comes to weep”. And so, Amir leaves with his “imaginary homeland” in his exilic consciousness. This time the departure is more than voluntary, to what the novel constructs as a safe haven - the United States.
The Extraterritorial, Dastaguir

While most of the novels depict a journey from one place to another Atiq Rahimi’s Dari novella *Earth and Ashes (Khaestar-o-Khak)* begins in media res of a journey. At the outset we find the novel’s protagonist, the old man Dastaguir leaning against the iron railings of the bridge, that he has taken to reach the Karkar coal mine, where his son Murad works. This in-between structure in many ways represents Dastaguir’s media res what Said in his essay “Reflections on Exile” defines as the “extraterritorial condition” (174). Wedged and baffled between a definitive de-territorializing and a dubious re-territorializing, Dastaguir is Steiner’s version of the “extraterritorial” whom Said defines is “rendered homeless by... quasi-barbarism” (74). In the text the “quasi-barbarism” of the Russians who had scorched down his village of Abqul. Exiled like Amir and Baba, Dastaguir and his grandson the sole survivors epitomize what Said calls “the unhealable rift between a human being and his native place” (173).

Unhoused and a wanderer throughout the novel and accompanied by his deaf grandson, Dastaguir’s exilic experience is a solitary one, “a deprivation” Said maintains, “felt at not being with others in the communal habitation” (177). Despite the companion-listener role that Mirza Qadir, the old philosophical shopkeeper adopts, or the compassionate camaraderie of Shahmard who drives Dastaguir to the mines, Dastaguir cannot bear the loneliness of his predicament. With nothing to save and hold on to except the distressing memories of his destroyed family, his home, and the anticipated dreaded and desired meeting with his son, Dastaguir is the prototype of the exile, sans spatiotemporal locations.

If Amir feels displaced and alienated at home owing to his displacing father’s masculinity, Murad was evicted from his home- the village owing to an excessive show of masculinity. Removed from his village and unaware of what happened to Abqul, Murad whom we never meet, works in the coal mines in darkness and dust, ironically what his village has been reduced to. Said remarks how exiles are often in search of armies and states, Murad in Dastaguir’s imagined tribal militant masculinity is an army for Dastaguir. In an effort to overcome this “crippling sorrow of estrangement” (Said 173), Dastaguir hopes to reassemble his fragmented and futile exilic existence through a union with his son Murad. It is through this amalgamation Dastaguir’s de-territorialised self expects a re-territorialisation with a lost patria and regain unification between the self and its true home.

In these Medias res Dastaguir has no mirrors to reflect his imaginary homeland but is shredded by shards of wounding reminiscences. Deeply marred by his experience Dastaguir is assailed not only by nightmares of his homeland, but dreams of his possible union with his
son, visions that acquire terrifying overtones. In a reverie, Dastaguir hallucinates that he is reunited with Murad across a river of fire, with Murad wading the smouldering almost purgatorial fire, yet being unharmed. Anxious and estranged, from his land, roots and his past this re-patriation is crucial for him. The dream however, forestalls the unachieved reunion on which Dastaguir depends to reclaim his sense of self. Unlike Amir and Baba, there are no gains only losses immeasurable in Dastaguir’s elemental desolation that is by no means surmounted till the end, since he never achieves the re-patriation with his son.

Like Amir and Baba, Dastaguir also takes with him fragments from a lost patria. Some of which are themselves fragmented- like Yassin who is no longer whole as he is rendered deaf by the bombs, the apple blossom scarf a fragment of his wife and the “naswar”, a shrivel of Dastaguir’s masculine honour, objects which acquire deep significance in the context of the war. It is from this discontinuous state of being that we perceive the conflict, with and away from Dastaguir, in the empathetic second person narration of the novella. The seamless journey anticipates the cyclical nature of meaning(s) that will emerge in the depiction of the conflict.

III
The exiled-others and the intellectual-exile: Mariam, Laila in A Thousand Splendid Suns and the unnamed woman of The Patience Stone.

Gesa Zinn and Maureen Tobin Stanley, comment on the etymological similarity between the words “other” and “alien”, and point out how the latter word stems from “alius” meaning the “other”. Alienated and dislocated from centres of power and agency from the beginnings of time woman is the irrefutable “exiled-other”. As the incontrovertible “exiled-other”, women are de-centered subjects, disempowered agents and dispossessed inheritors of losses (3-5). Treated hostilely under different circumstances, they are oppressed by politics of embargo and estrangement, in their own land. Like many women, from varied national backgrounds, social classes, and ethnicities and so on, the Afghan women- Mariam and Laila in A Thousand Splendid Suns and the unnamed woman in The Patience Stone are alienated and excluded by the impermeable politics of dominant patriarchal setups.

Similar to the peripheral Dasan, Rocky and Nesakumaran, who are marginalized within and by a hegemonic state, these women are oppressed and brutalized within and by their war ravaged society. Mariam, Laila and the female protagonist of Rahimi’s novel are estranged individuals, and are thus the antithesis to being citizens, as they are unprotected, not granted rights by their states, remaining perpetual outsiders to a disinheritng nation state.
ruled by theocratic patriarchs. Though gendered exiles like Anil, the social construct and hence the exilic identity of Mariam, Laila and the female protagonist of Rahimi’s novel acquire a centrality, not dealt with in *Anil’s Ghost* who is first the exile and then a woman. No doubt, Anil’s gender renders her weak to some extent but this is never problematised in relation to the conflict wherein her transnational status protects her to a great extent. However these women are multiply marginalized gendered exiles, without any status or states to protect them.

Mariam the first female protagonist of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is the elemental foreigner, for hegemonic structures refuse to protect her and her fundamental human rights. Born in 1959, designated as the *harami* - the illegitimate, Mariam is incarcerated, confined and systematically dislocated, remaining almost till the very end of the novel, the asylum seeker. Being the daughter born out of the illicit relationship between the socially affluent Jalil and his onetime maid, now Mariam’s “Nana”, who is never named, Mariam practically lives in the outskirts of Gul Daman, with her mother in a Kolba. Nana repressed and victimized by class and her epilepsy, passes on to Mariam, her feelings of marginality and subordination. Rejecting Nana’s bitterness and anger as excessive and unwarranted, Mariam longs to be a part of a patria- Jalil and his household in Herat. It is Nana who ceaselessly draws the territorial limits to this patria for a “harami” like Mariam would “never have legitimate claim to the things people had- love, family, home and acceptance” (*A Thousand Splendid Suns*, 4)

While happy in her idyllic marginal setting, Mariam longs for this “fatherland” in her, inevitable exile. Towards this she longs for Thursdays, the day Jalil comes to visit her to listen to his stories and word pictures, by way of which she spins spools of this land which she cannot enter. Imagining this home, through Jalil, who like the projector in his theatre castst in cinematic technicolours, Mariam inhabits these through her dreams and private game with pebbles and stone. Rendered immobile between a home (land) she loves and a host (land) she blamelessly desires to be a part of, Mariam perceives with the patria, and despite her deep and profuse love for Nana, is unable to distinguish Jalil’s priorities as a patriarch.

Though he provides for them, Jalil, who has his harem of three legal wives and ten legitimate children and is the rich owner of cinema theatres, cannot include the “haramis” Mariam and Nana within his life of lavishness and grandeur, so it suits him to relegate them to the Kolba. But, when Mariam’s desire for inclusion, visibility, legitimacy and social citizenship in Jalil’s patria, get verbalized in a birthday wish, in the spring of 1974 (when
Mariam turns fifteen), Mariam is turned out of even her peripheral Kolba. The unreality of her imagined fatherland is manifested in her desire to see the simulated animation of Pinocchio, “the puppet boy”, which is being screened in Jalil’s theatre, that conversely she never gets to see. Ironically this is perhaps the final and only thing Mariam asks for, for henceforth Mariam is herself reduced to a marionette.

Despite Nana’s bitter warnings Mariam believes she can cross over and be granted legality. But Mariam’s “reel host land” gets ripped apart when she encounters Jalil’s real face in Herat. In Herat, initially jubilant like the new migrant, Mariam perceives that no one is conscious of her “harami-alien” status. On the contrary at Jalil’s gate whose borders are policed, limiting entry, Mariam’s alien-illegitimate status is writ large like Pinocchio’s nose and she is banished. Shunned to sleep on the road, Mariam, the illegal migrant attempts to force her way within the territories of citizenship, but is cast out by the unperturbed patriarch-Jalil. Deceived and disillusioned, Mariam returns to be re-“matriated” into the Kolba, but Nana’s suicide, committed out of her sense of betrayal renders Mariam homeless forever. In the changing worlds that remain alien to Mariam, Nana’s one council becomes the permanent reality of Mariam’s life: “…tahamul. Endure”(A Thousand Splendid Suns:82).

The equations of who desires and who denies are reversed after Nana’s death. Mariam who now sees with Nana’s eyes can perceive the façade in Jalil’s false assurances and his lurking hollowness. Rejecting his inclusion into the very patria that she had desired a day ago, Mariam voluntarily exiles herself in Jalil’s house wherein she experiences a condition marked by painful disorientation and abjection. In the reality of the host land, it is for fragments of her Kolba-homeland that she desires, in the figures of Mullah Faizullah and Bibi Jo. Thrown headlong into an unsafe world with no Nana to protect her, Mariam’s life like Jalil’s identical wooden Matryoksha dolls becomes a series of oppressions that are indistinguishable in denying her voice and agency beginning with her marriage to the middle-aged widower, Rashid. Her deportation to Kabul involves two acts: one taken by those in power, Jalil’s legal wives, the other by Jalil with his quite acquiescence to it. The expulsion of Mariam to Kabul is desired for she is the living stigma of Jalil’s scandalous act; an act that would exclude him and his wives in their elite social circles.

Once in Kabul, Mariam’s life of penal servitude to another ruthless patriarch embarks on its continual journey. Between her longing for the familiar and modest joys of the Kolba, her mother and Mullah Faizullah and the strangeness of Rashid’s new house in Deh-Mezang, Mariam spends her first week in solitary exile. However she soon attempts to make a home out of this enforced space. Like the gastro poetics of the exile, Mariam attempts to
acclimatize through food. But the initial joys of Ramadan in Kabul or the joys of an expectant mother are short lived. The inability to provide the patriarch with a son to replace the one he had lost, ostracizes Mariam forever in Rashid’s household. It is from within these, multiply concealed and marginalized spaces that Mariam views the conflict as it enfolds in the background of her traumatic life.

Born on the day the socialist take over Afghanistan Laila’s life is less excluding and complexly marginalizing as Mariam’s, at least until the war breaks out. But when the Mujahedeen’s start fighting the Russians and her brothers join the Mujahedeen, Laila is metaphorically cast out of her home. Her Patriot Mother Fariba’s love for her Mujahedeen sons Ahmed and Noor, supplants Laila. Though loved and cared for in ways that are denied to Mariam, Laila feels alienated by her mother and the masculine ideals of war that exalt her brothers as Mujahedeen when alive and Shahids when dead. Mother’s self-exile also fragments the ideal place this home had been, something Laila has never seen but has constructed through fragments narrated to her by her father, Hakim. This loss of connection with her mother Laila suffers acutely especially in the absence of her childhood friend Tariq. Leaving Afghanistan for Hakim, Laila’s father is tantamount to leaving its rich heritage behind. But when the Mujahedeen start fighting each other, Afghanistan is no longer secure. However Hakim and Fariba’s anticipated re-territorialization in the prospective San Francisco, suggested in Hakim’s T-shirt, of course never happens. Under the “whistling” missile that strikes the house, Hakim and Fariba die leaving Laila homeless at the mercy of lecherous tyrants like Rasheed and bigoted militia like the Taliban.

Tariq represents home with all its connotations of warmth, security, companionship, love and sharing. But with his erstwhile migration to Pakistan, and the scheming Rasheed, this home is denied for Laila till the very end of the novel. The reader, who is by now familiar with the tyrannical Rasheed, can see in his overt philoxenia (hospitality to strangers) towards the wounded Laila, a clandestine and dastardly scheme. In a relationship that smacks of Rasheed’s pedophilic desires, he marries Laila, who is old enough to be his daughter. After Laila willfully and strategically re-locates her roots within Rashid’s home, before long she too becomes like Mariam – the dispossessed, castaway doubly walled- in within the penal complex of Taliban occupied Afghanistan and within that the dungeons of Rasheed’s home.

These twin exiled subjects, Mariam and Laila are not only subject to the macrocosmic armed conflict without but experience it through its agent within the home: the husband, Rashid. Through their mutual self-definition and by helping each other they determine who
they are thus making their fragmented selves whole. Though this sisterhood, equipped with sacrifice, selflessness and unconditional love is an unarmed contingent yet it will battle ruthless warlords and pitiless patriarchs.

Like Edward Said’s exile, Mariam and Laila within oppressive structures are permanent social outcasts, untouchables—“someone always at odds with their harsh environment” (“Intellectual Exile” 8). However in the end they find harmony either in sacrifice or through selfless service. The unnamed woman protagonist of The Patience Stone on the other hand cannot and will not make the adjustment and prefers to remain “resistant, unaccommodated and outside the mainstream” (Said “Intellectual Exile” 12).

Alienated throughout her life in her father and father-in-law’s house owing to centuries old patriarchal institution, in the present of the novel, she is alienated from the war within a ramshackle house. Interestingly in this novella the woman exiles herself from the armed conflict to remain in its background in order to challenges its hegemony and it’s complicity with a patriarchal structure to marginalize her. Hence though a member of a restraining society she remains the outsider, the “nay-sayer” constantly restless and unsettled, thereby unsettling others.

Relentlessly at odds with imposing structures be it in the form of her mother-in-law, her quail obsessed father, her Jihadist husband or the rambling Mullah the woman never fully adjusts and dislikes the trappings of accommodation imposed on her. As she stands as a marginal figure outside the home appropriating privileges and power denied to her by the centre), she enjoys what Said calls the privileges of the exile “of never taking anything for granted, of learning to make do in instable circumstances which would terrify other people” (“Intellectual Exile” 10) As the “intellectual exile”, the woman tends to see her society and war not simply as they are but as they have become. Within the larger history of her land, the particular comatose situation of her husband is the result of a series of historical choices made by him. As the one outside and distanced she can therefore debunk notions of permanence and immortality, martyrdom and heavenly paradise. Nothing in her eyes is unchangeable and irreversible, the excluding war and her exilic “outsiderliness” have well-informed her about the transience of all. Being the “intellectual in exile” she is ironic and skeptical .From this perspective, being a marginal is empowering for it is not required to follow a fixed path. Her monologue, like the exile-marginal’s journey, becomes a process of self-discovery where she does things according to her own pattern and revels in her self-revelation.
Like Said’s intellectual marginal the woman, though not an expatriate or immigrant, it is always possible for her to think like one. Being as marginal and as undomesticated as someone who is in real exile sanctions the woman to be “risky than habitual” (“Intellectual Exile”, 12). Hence she refuses to proceed with caution with her disclosures. As the “exilic intellectual” she does not respond with the conventional loss when her mother-in-law wishes to displace her and her barren womb, but counters it with “the audacity of daring” managed through the Hakim and her aunt (Said “Intellectual Exile” 13). Not afraid to upset the applecart, the woman represents change and will not be confined by a stagnating war. In this last Afghan text chosen for study the exilic marginal arms herself before her unarmed comatose jihadist husband, mounting her stringent attack on structures that advocate war in its manifold forms.

Hosseini’s more recent novel And the Mountains Echoed, published in 2011, is in many ways a departure from both The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns. Moving away from the singular perspective of the intertwined dual lives of two boys (The Kite Runner) and two women (A Thousand Splendid Suns), And the Mountains Echoed weaves multiple narratives between generations of hybrid characters as they navigate per force across the world. The narrative that moves to and fro between Afghanistan, The United States, France and Greece collapses and coalesces borders while recording the stories of myriad exiles, exiled for varied reason who crowd and traverse across plural spaces in plural stories. Poverty, wars, escape, betrayal and preservation of self, lead to different kinds of exile in And the Mountains Echoed.

In his interview, Hosseini comments how the idea for the novel came to him from the image of a man dragging a red wheelbarrow with a girl inside and a boy walking about ten spaces behind. It is precisely with this the novel also begins, when the father Saboor undertakes this journey from Shadbagh to Kabul to re-territorialize his two year old daughter Pari, with a rich family in Kabul. This enforced displacement of Pari unbeknown to her and her fiercely protective almost paternal older brother Abdullah is one of the central acts of the novel that echoes across the mountainous terrains of the text and the lives of many characters. By selling and thus casting out his daughter through an earlier marriage, an act that traumatizes Saboor till his dying day, the poverty stricken Saboor hopes his remaining family survive another winter.

The dislodgement of Pari from his life affects Abdullah in profound ways. The loss creates a chasm that Abdullah tries to fill by naming his daughter after his lost sister,
encumbering the second Pari in manifold ways. This pain is suggested towards the end of the novel in the note he leaves behind for his sister before his Alzheimer’s sets in and the feathers he collects all along for his lost sister. Abdullah’s exile from Shadbagh and Afghanistan during the wars first to Pakistan then to America is not painstakingly narrated but is recounted through other people’s story in different contexts, like Gholam’s narration to Adel or the second Pari’s narration. Thus Abdullah and his step–brother Iqbal join the millions who left Afghanistan during the war. Unlike Baba in *The Kite Runner*, Abdullah does not sentimentalize notions of watan and so on, but uses Afghan cultural codes and signifiers to run his Kabob restaurant in America for his survival. His desire and longing for his homeland is never extravagantly narrated but is suggested in the Farsi and religion classes he makes his daughter undertake.

The sister Pari, on the other hand does not unduly suffer from this repatriation for being small she soon forgets. The wealth of the Wahdati’s and the Parisian part of her hybrid mother Nila, soon leads to Pari moving forever to Paris where as the text tells us (*And the Mountains Echoed*,228) Afghanistan recedes in her mind. In absolute contrast to Abdullah’s life which is affected by the war, she is far from such tumultuous history and reads about it like other French through the news and the papers. Her French identity (suggested in her name which is the French for Paris) is further stressed in the roots she establishes in France through her marriage and her children. Except for an occasional sensation of an abyss whose vacancy she is unable to fill Pari has no memory of her Afghan past.

The daughter Pari the second generation exile however suffers alienation and a sense of rootlessness. Clinging initially to the doppelganger image of her father’s lost sister, Pari tries to overcome her alienation. Desiring to assimilate with her American surrounding, Pari is enforced with Afghan cultural codes – a root that she has no desire for. Initially overwhelmed by her father’s love she soon finds home imprisoning and restraining. The course in the art school through which she hopes to liberate herself is never accomplished once her mother develops fatal ovarian cancer and subsequently her father contracts Alzheimer’s.

Timur and Idris Badrishi who leave Afghanistan during the 1980s exodus return in the spring of 2003 during the period of reconstruction. This section of the novel mocks and derides “the wealthy wide-eyed exile - comes home to gawk at the carnage now that the bogeymen have left” (*And the Mountains Echoed* 23). Hosseini is scathing in his attack of his fellow Afghan exiles, which though fortunate in escaping the carnage, return to
Afghanistan to take pictures and make false promises, but go back, forget and as Gamini says in *Anil’s Ghost* “hit the system”. Idris Badrishi is a case in point, whose perspective is what the novel adopts. Idris is critical even embarrassed by his cousin Timur the stereotypical returnee who narrates the story of their exodus and their need to return to Afghanistan to “give back”, to “reconnect” and so on. But Idris exposes this facade for they have come to capitalise on the war situation by reclaiming their ancestral property to rent it to foreign-aid workers. Idris is mortified at Timur’s behaviour like “the quintessential Afghan American”(*And the Mountains Echoed*). But Hosseini uses the strategy of irony to unveil not so much Timur’s hypocritical act but the “quiet and sensitive Idris”. It is Idris who acts as the “quintessential immigrant” for he fails miserably through his lack of inner strength and innate humanitarianism when he fails the wounded Roshi. Having promised her surgery and help, once he goes back to America, the home theatre and the recarpeting gradually creep into his priority list and Roshi is soon forgotten. It turns out however that the supposedly duplicitous Timur is the one who enables Roshi’s recovery and restoration.

In sharp contrast to Idris, Hosseini projects Markos, another doctor. Markos’ personal story influences his professional choice. Thaila, his childhood friend and companion’s accident makes him a face surgeon. He dedicates his life to reconstructing and replenishing children damaged by the war in Afghanistan. Other selfless voluntary exiles emerge in the story like Amra Ademovic, the Bosnian nurse.

Hosseini reveals quite another face of the Afghan woman and her alienation in Nila Wahdati and Parwana, Saboor’s wife. Both women belong to the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. Nila Wahdati is upper class, urban, rich and rebellious. Alienated from a sense of self, Nila attempts to fill this inner blankness through writing blatantly sensuous poetry, marrying Suleiman Wahdati and later by adopting Pari. Bold and rebellious, as she states in her interview to a French journalist, she comments how her elite Afghan father could not restrain her much to his chagrin. Rejecting domestication and refusing to nurse her paralysed husband, Nila exiles herself to Paris. When the Taliban later take over Afghanistan, Nabi is unable to visualise what they would have done to Nila with her sensuous attires, her art gatherings and her cocktail evenings. In Paris, despite her many amorous liaisons and she attempts to gain an inner rootedness, the void within remains bare, vulnerable and insatiable, leading to her suicide.
Parwana is alienated from recognition, attention and admiration from birth owing to her more glamorous twin, Masooma. When Masooma too desires Saboor, Parwana surreptitiously injures her causing Masooma to fall from the swing. Paralysed, and cast out of life, Parwana however is restrained by the dependent Masooma. Unlike the suffering Sanaubar and the sacrificing Mariam of Hosseini’s earlier novels, Parwana takes control of her life by exiling her sister. Though the idea is suggested by Masooma, Parwana carries out the plan of abandoning her sister in the desert with a heavy but determined heart.

IV

The Afghan Wars and the Sohrabs and the Rostams

Unlike the warscape – the prisons and torture chambers or the interment grounds-of the Sri Lankan texts, that blurred fact and fiction, through its near-distance perspective of the larger war, the Afghan texts imaginatively excavate stories by inscaping the warscape on the personal. The complex experiences of individuals become a channel to narrativise the multipart experiences of the body politic. In thus, transcreating the conflict rather than transliterating the conflict as the Sri Lankan texts do, the Afghan texts narrate the political through the personal, history through her/ his- stories. Fragments of individual’s lives are collectively yet separately employed to narrate the nation’s history. In this mingling of the private story with a national narrative, individual memory is important and precious, for it becomes the mode of assimilating the personal and thereby the political and historical. This narration of the intensely personal and thereby the political also makes some of the texts allegorical and symbolic. In writing about experiences not really survived by the authors, unlike some of the Sri Lankan texts, the texts choose multiple perspectives ranging from the first person narration of The Kite Runner to the second person narration of Earth and Ashes or the free indirect discourses of A Thousand Splendid Suns and The Patience Stone. From these different perspectives, the texts disinter other stories of the war from the margins of the frontline, that sometimes create rigid binaries, other times the binaries acquire ambivalent paradigms. Mostly the perception of victims, factions of the perpetrators of violence blur in the analogous nature of the onslaught, whether it’s the Russians, the Mujahedeen’s, the Taliban or the war on terror. Like Afghanistan these victims, victim-survivors too suffer, endure and resurrect in their struggle against many belligerents.
If *The Kite Runner* takes us through the history of the three decades of the conflict with particular focus on the causes that led to the emergence of the Taliban and depiction of Taliban ruled Afghanistan, *Earth and Ashes* focuses on the memory of a destruction a small village Abqul by the Russians as part of their scorch earth policy against the insurgent Mujahedeen. Important political actors and history form a canvas against which the private lives are microcosmically presented to relate the macrocosm.

A common framework the two texts use is the story of “Sohrab and Rostam” in the Persian epic *The Shahnama* by Ferdusi. If *The Kite Runner* uses it to interpret a personal conflict,*Earth and Ashes* interprets it multiply. But both the novels use the epic to comment on a characteristic feature the Afghan wars have acquired, wherein father kills the son, kith kills kin and kin kills kind. Torn apart from within, fuelled from without, the texts in their depiction of these wars merge the personal and the political with the allegorical-symbolic.

Commenting on the use of allegory in contemporary texts, Craig Owen, the postmodern artist observes how allegory occurs when one text is doubled by another (68). In *The Kite Runner* though this allegory is not overt several textual and authorial comments suggest how, the initial part of the story i.e. the personal story of Amir, Baba, Hassan and Ali “doubles” and can be read as narrativising the larger history. This suggestion of the prevalence of the other, historical text and the allegorical nature of the novel can be culled from the fact that Amir, the narrator- writer’s narrative strength comes from the dilution of irony, of stating a story while meaning another. This fact is referred to by Rahim Khan in response to the allegorical story Amir writes as a child. Further Amir demonstrates the functioning of allegory, by interpreting the story of Sohrab and Rostam in terms of his personal life and his relationship with his father. In an interview on his portrayal of the conflict, Hosseini states that the rape of Hassan by Assef, watched by a hiding Amir, is an allegory of how the rest of the world passively watched as Afghanistan was torn apart by internecine war after the Soviet’s left (Interview with Roach, 15th Dec, 2007). Thus in the memory narrative of his childhood and exile, the public history is read through the private and the nation’s conflict history is narrated through the characters’ story.

Therefore Baba - always visualized as a kind of emperor, is born the year Zahir Shah becomes the ruler. On the night Daoud displaces the king in a bloodless coup, Amir feels displaced by his father, (wanting to empty his vein of his father’s blood) as he watches Ali’s love for Hassan. The immature and infantile socialism of Daoudis enacted in the hypocriticalegalitarian feat of the child Amir, a Pashtun who promises a television for the Hazara Hassan. The assertion of the rising fundamentalist is suggested in the supremacist
tyranny of Assef and his “Final solutions” for the Hazaras. With the imminent coming of the Soviets, the socialist liberalism of Baba’s household departs with Amir’s conspiracy against Hassan.

If in these early sections the political conflict does not affect the personal and remains a backdrop interpreted through the personal, the Taliban rule of Afghanistan binds the personal and the political in complex ways. By the time the exiled Amir marginalized by and from the conflict comes to Afghanistan in the immediate present of the novel, the allegorical, long distance viewing is no longer permissible, for the conflict that contaminates his homeland also contaminates his home.

In the intensely symbolic and what Andrew Solomon calls, allegorical tale of Earth and Ashes, Rahimi lays claim to the culturally significant Shahnama, and as its interpreter in his novella, he makes it something other than the original (Book Review, 2002). The text’s reference to the eleventh century text of Ferdusi, like The Kite Runner makes the story of the armed conflict of Sohrab and Rostam, the frame for narrativising the armed conflict in Earth and Ashes. But Rahimi’s story, as Owen observes of postmodern art, is not “hermeneutics, it adds another meaning to the original” (70). Rahimi does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured, but supplements it with a further meaning. He manipulates this story by pluralising it in the context of the Russian war, thus a central authoritative meaning is replaced by multiple supplements and significations. In this Rahimi is not challenging the story from Shahnama but visualizes the fragmenting text of the Afghan-Soviet war through Ferdusi’s text.

Mirza Qadir, who feels betrayed by his son, who has run away to join the Russians, reverses the filicide of Sohrab by Rostam into contemporary patricides, in the context of contemporary war, where Sohrabs kill Rostams, influenced by new Zohaks. The mythical Zohak becomes ideologies whether of the Russians or the Mujahedeen, which falsely indoctrinate the susceptible youth who are easily driven to believe. The text encodes all these bodies that enlist the young in war, through Mirza Qadir, as “Zohaks”. While the mythical Zohak literally eats their heads, the contemporary ideologue- Zohaks metaphorically eat their minds. Mirza adds to the complex intertextuality by palimpsestically creating another text on a painting that hangs in his shop. In this text it is the young who are the Zohaks, having pushed their fathers into a pit. Demonstrating the incompleteness of even this past-present palimpsest Mirza adds a possible future, where he prophetically anticipates in his comment, “their own snakes will devour their own minds”, the, civil wars in Afghanistan, post the Soviet departure. For Dastaguir on the other hand his words will be the deliberate “tura” that
will kill Murad. Effacing the original Rostam who unknowingly killed his son, Dastaguir writes himself over the effaced text as a conscious murderer who will drive the “dagger of grief” into his son’s heart. The moment Dastaguir creates this palimpsest he disbands the dual texts, burying the epic in the binds of its literary past, “Let Rostam rest in his bed of words; let Sohrab lie in his shroud of paper” (*Earth and Ashes*, 24).

Allegorical imagery, Owen observes is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them (72). In his interview with J.K.Fowler, Rahimi states how his novel is heavily symbolic and clarifies that these symbols are not private but has taken possession of them from a collective culture. Commenting on this appropriated imagery of the apple, with which the second person narration begins; Rahimi calls it the first fruit of man and woman. In an evocative act, Dastaguir gives Yassin an apple as the text begins, with Yassin’s whimper, “I am hungry” (*Earth and Ashes* 1). Throughout the text this is the only fruit Dastaguir gives, for this is the only one he has. Elaborating on the allegorical significance of Dastaguir, Murad and Yassin; Rahimi comments in a 2011 interview that, they represent three generations of men in Afghan history. Dastaguir is the older generation which had its tradition and custom (the naswar and the apple blossom scarf); Murad is the generation of the Mujahedeen (Rahimi’s generation) and the deaf Yassin the future generations, crippled by the war.

In the Quran, the apple is the forbidden fruit; however the apples, in the allegorical novel recommend other things. As allegories, as Owen comments, they “both proffer and defer” this meaning, and thus frustrate our desire that they are “directly transparent to our signification” (70). What Dastaguir hands over is perhaps the complex forbidden fruit- the nation as he knows it with its ancient traditions and customs but now sullied by extraneous and indigenous wars and feuds (symbolised in the Soviet truck that raises dust and Dastaguir’s faded, discoloured dress). So the more he attempts to clean it, the dirtier it becomes, suggesting the circuitous nature of the conflict that will embroil the nation. This fruit is forbidden for Yassin for he is too young to understand the complexities of his nation and so grapples with it with his canine, like the bestialities the younger generation will put the nation through. This image of the apple gets fragmented when Dastaguir like the internal feuds now cuts the apple into “manageable” parts.

The “naswar” that Dastaguir takes from a box which Murad has given him is a predilection of the Pashtuns. A type of tobacco, it becomes an anaesthetic that Dastaguir resorts to when he wishes to numb his pain. Within the multiplicity of meanings the text generates, the naswar can be read as tribal honour, ethical code, held on to as an identity. But
the text problematises such an honour because naswar as the text metafictionally comments, through Dastaguir’s wife, is bad for health and cancerous. The cancer that eats his nation, Rahimi seems to suggest, parades as identity wars within the garbs of the Mujahedeen (what Murad represents) leading to the Taliban. In a reflection of his face that Dastaguir catches in the cover of naswar box, we see the externalization of the political history and its changes on the spatiotemporal of the land. Dastaguir’s face is sickled like Afghanistan with lines “like thirsty worms around a hole” (*Earth and Ashes* 2) symbolising feuds and counter-feuds. And the heavy, discoloured turban smothered in dust, becomes a metaphor and metonymy for Afghanistan.

Rahimi comments on the apple blossom scarf as a mixed symbol of identity, sensibility and hope (interview with Fowler March 2011). Belonging to Dastaguir’s dead wife it compositely symbolises female chastity and honour. Also apple blossom in its sober pink as against the blood red apple, suggests peace, hope and tranquil beginnings. In its many references to this cloth in the text, the scarf’s plural allegorical significations, super induce in Owens’ words “avertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences, upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events” (73). Two dream visions occur syntagmatically one after the other but defy a syntagmatic analysis. In one Dastaguir’s wife asks him to use the cloth to wipe Murad’s sweating as he crosses the smouldering river, thus tranquilising Murad’s overflowing wrath. However in another vision following this dream the wife demands the scarf as a protection of her honour. The scarf thus becomes in Owen’s words “surrealistically baroque” (73). As it is written over with many meanings for the same chastity and honour which is now lost can be the very reason that arms the conflict, while it also signifies a calming presence and beauty in the midst of the war. Yet Dastaguir as a fragment of his self leaves behind the naswar box for Murad and pointedly not the apple blossom scarf. A strangely incomplete-fragment, which Murad will perhaps decipher based on its cover rather than what lies within leading him like many of his generation to join the Mujahidin. This symbolic allegorical level of narration continues into the recounting of Dastaguir’s suppressed memories. By engaging in symbols that allow concentric and contradictory meanings to emerge, Rahimi debunks absolutisms in interpreting the conflict for meaning/reality is subjective and individualistic.

Both *The Kite Runner* and *Earth and Ashes* are memory texts, which “rethink” and “rework” history (Darvasi 1). Towards this *The Kite Runner* relies exclusively on the individual, premeditated memory of a seemingly candid narrator Amir, while *Earth and Ashes* narrates through the unintentional, unconscious what Owen identifies as
“photomontage” memory of Dastaguir (75). Both attempt to problematize through their particular remembering, carefully forgotten historical memories and circulate this memory to see the presentness of this past.

More distanced than Anil from the conflict in his standpoint, perspective and experience of the wars, the retrospective narrative of Amir, the exilic –escapee subject who retreated before the conflict, begins by remembering a forgetting. Set against the thirty years of transforming wars of Afghanistan, the novel begins in December 2001 in San Francisco with Amir recollecting multiple frameworks of personal memories, removed spatially and temporally from his present, a twenty six year ago winter evening in Kabul, an immediate summer of 2000 in Pakistan, and an even further removed Kabul during the last phase of the reign of Zahir Shah. However the dynamics of this individual memory narrative consists in a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting. Amir attempts to bury, erase, hide and overwrite the reminiscence of that particular day in the winter of 1975.Yet his psychological and emotional anxieties impose a perpetual, enforced revisiting of this temporal and spatial framework.

Memory studies scholars like Aleida Assmann differentiate types of forgetting and remembering. What can be named the “active forgetting” of Amir materializes from the “trashing and destroying politics” practiced by Amir’s hegemonic clan the Pashtuns on the persecuted minority the Hazaras and their history (Aleida Assmann 97). This collective’s “active destructive violence” of deliberate forgetting for centuries of the wronged and victimised Hazaras is articulated not only in the burial that Amir attempts, but is also self-consciously demonstrated (Assmann98). Amir comments how hegemonic history makes no mention of the Hazaras in Afghanistan’s history(The Kite Runner 8).The reason for this active forgetting is located by Amir in an alternative history book by an Iranian, Khorami, which comments on the “unspeakable violence” committed by the Pashtuns on the Hazaras.

In order to write- his- story, and thereby his nation’s, this normative act of forgetting by his community collective has to be unarmed and the unknown stories of the Hazaras must be retrieved. To accomplish this Amir “actively and passively remembers” (Assmann 98) Hassan’s past as past and his past as present. The correlation of the pastness of Hassan’s past and the present form of the past is the linchpin on which Amir’s story moves. By arming the subaltern through memory, Amir self-consciously displaces himself to relocate the peripheral Hazara to the titular centre of his narrative. Hassan’s story is narrated and is obtainable only in fragments like the subaltern’s, as against Amir’s which is represented in its entirety. But then in prioritizing Hassan’s story, Amir’s whole story depends for its completion on
Hassan’s story, without which it would be in pieces. Belonging to the outer edge of the inner set of colonizing Pashtuns, Amir’s story attempts to exhume, like Anil and Sarath, the politics of exploitation fractures and hostilities in his society that have been silenced into forgetting. Through an intensely personal gaze, Amir’s story is to individually actively remember a careful collective forgetting.

Even before the marauding Soviets’ tankers and artillery lay waste to the land, the seemingly peaceful Afghanistan is ubiquitous with strife and persecution. Although the exilic memory presents a pre-conflict apparently open Afghanistan, when one could watch John Wayne films, drink Coca Cola, drive around in imported cars and watch soccer matches this is undercut by Amir’s awareness that these privileges are made possible because of his class. In his interview with James Roach, Hosseini states that “The romanticised Afghanistan that lives in the minds of our parents (and in my own childhood memory) probably never existed” (Dec, 2007) That Afghan society had fissures and frictions with its politics of exclusion and oppression owing to its heterogeneous tribal identities, is narrated in the novel through the unequal conflict between the armed Pashtuns and the unarmed Hazaras. It is this clash of indigenous identities that have caused the conflict to spiral to its present form.

Denise Phillips and other scholars comment on how the history of the Hazaras, an oppressed minority, who have lived on the edge of economic survival, is chronicled on persecution and violation. Originally belonging to Hazarajat, their traditional homeland in Afghanistan’s central highlands, the Hazaras have been systematically tyrannized by different regimes throughout Afghanistan’s history. Beginning with the repressive rule of Amir Abdur Rahman (1880–1901) who declared the ethnic Pashtuns supreme and mobilized a religious and ethnic-based hatred against the Hazaras to conquer them in the Hazara-Afghan wars of 1890 to 1893, the Hazaras have been systematically ethnically persecuted by the hegemonic Pashtuns Under Rahman’s ethnic politics many Hazaras were tortured, raped and massacred, and sold into slavery. Much of Hazarajat was laid waste and its agricultural economy destroyed, causing starvation. With government sanction, soldiers and Pashtun nomads were able to seize or use Hazara lands and possibly thousands fled to Central and South Asia. An example of how the majority manipulated history, Phillips notes that Abdur Rahman celebrated this conquest in a narrative of nationhood which demeaned the Hazaras. Under the banner of nationalism in the early twentieth century, the ruling Pashtuns claimed racial superiority and tried to assert their identity, culture and history over all other ethnic groups. Hazarajat was removed from official maps and lands were divided into five provinces to weaken the Hazaras’ political authority. Until 1978, the Hazaras were
marginalized, taxed indiscriminately and denied equal rights. No justice was gained for atrocities committed, and violent land disputes and sectarian conflicts continue to this day. Hazaras have had little formal education about their ethnic history (Phillips 177-185).

It is against this history of harrying and hounding that Amir narrativises Hassan’s story. Even before the pivotal rape of Hassan by Assef, the neighbourhood bully, who later reemerges as the “ethnic cleanser”, Hassan and Ali’s peripheral space and the harassment therein, is painstakingly detailed by Amir. Of Hassan’s many tormentors, the unkindest is Amir as the First Person narrative self-critically makes it clear and as the authorial voice suggests by naming his protagonist after the Hazara persecutor- Amir Abdur Rahman.

Within the text’s attempt to narrate the armed conflict in Afghanistan, Hassan is the face of victimised goodness, while Assef is the archetype of the menacing and the vindictive, the real bogey man. As a child he is the neighbourhood bully, one who venerates Adolf Hitler and is obsessed by the creed of ethnic despotism that speaks about a homogenous Afghan national identity which locates the Pashtuns as the pure Afghans and sees the “Flat-Nose” Hazara Hassan as polluting his watan. Grant Andrews’s comments that Assef’s discrimination is however ironic since he is half-German and has blond hair and blue eyes. Andrews also adds that later as a member of the Taliban, to camouflage these markers of his own difference Assef wears a turban and dark sunglasses, thus, problematising the ethno-cultural boundaries of Afghan identity which he tries to maintain (56). In Amir’s view he is an incorporation of destructive and hateful behaviour in the novel: he is a pedophile, drug addict, fundamentalist, self-proclaimed aficionada of Hitler (The Kite Runner, 35). Amir explains that he would later learn that the English word for a “creature” such as Assef is “sociopath” (The Kite Runner 41). Assef’s childhood hatred of Hazaras portends the Taliban ideology of Pashtun supremacy. The Taliban are Sunni Muslims and belong to the dominant Pashtun group. Committed to a mixture of Pashtunwali, the Pashtun’s tribal codes, and a fundamental interpretation of Islam’s Shari a law, they justified massacres such as that at Mazar-I-Sharif, particularized in the novel in the execution of Hassan by the Taliban and Assef’s enslavement of the young child Sohrab. Hazaras were specifically targeted by the Taliban because they were seen as the “infidel” Shiites.

If Amir consciously remembers a forgetting to understand a present, in Earth and Ashes Dastaguir remembers to forget an immediate traumatic past that surfaces reflexively in the form of daydreams and hallucinations where images of the past combine with the perception of the present. The “active forgetting” Dastaguir attempts is perforce recounted twice once at the coercion of Mirza Qadir and the second time to Shahmard the driver who
drives him to the mines. Dastaguir a fragmented being cannot assimilate the larger historical
details and “the usual flowing story line is replaced by a string of fragments” (Darvasi 2). Caught in the terror and counter –terror of the war, between the Russians and the Mujahedeen’s, Dastaguir remembers fractions of the war in the fire and dust that engulfs his house. For Dastaguir this world of the conflict are the reflections of a broken mirror which makes visible the undesirable (the shameful spectacle of his nude daughter-in-law), and indiscernible what he wishes to fathom, the arcane grave the house had become for his wife and his other son. Remorseful about his survival, unlike Dasan and Nesakumaran, Dastaguir will not assume the role of witness to this criminal event. Not wishing to rehabilitate what he sees as dishonourable, Dastaguir wishes to bury it completely. Even as Amir’s sense of self depends on the retrieval of the subaltern’s story, Dastaguir deflects this memory to avoid complete disintegration. Towards this Dastaguir suppresses the subaltern’s voice – his wife and Zaynab’s (Murad’s wife) primarily. But the subaltern cannot be silenced and in his dream visions they ricochet, acquiring agency and voice beyond his conscious control.

Philippe Frison comments on these dream visions of Dastaguir and associates some of the images to helplessness- the vision of the emasculated Yassin and to the denigration of female honour and chastity- the nude Zaynab who reappears in her glistening white body (151-153). However since in the dreams a number of subconscious illusions fuse to become, “photomontage” dreams, the dreams are complexly expressive. Jujube trees Dendle and Touwaide comment are symbolic in Islam of strong, noble and cheerful person who benefits people at large (112). But in the dream though Dastaguir stands on a Jujube tree, he cannot benefit his grandson with the fruits of the tree- lessons in strength and nobility. Instead Dastaguir is weak and disempowered; this absolute lack of power becomes his loss of control, over his body functions. From this repressed sense of failure, Dastaguir goes deeper into his subconscious symbolized by the door that takes him to a treeless garden, what Afghanistan has become, with a naked Zaynab playing with her unborn daughter, whom Yassin has covered with his grandmother’s apple blossom scarf. The loss of honour and tribal code that Dastaguir has felt as the patriarch of his family is forcefully witnessed in this vision of the land robbed of cultural honour and its ethnic pride sullied by invaders. If Zaynab’s nude body is the site on which Dastaguir perceives his disintegrated masculine ideals, on this body the text suggests Murad will construct his future cycle of revenge and counter-revenge. An extension of Dastaguir’s sense of a lost manhood, since he could not protect his watan, emerges in the emasculation of Yassin. This reemerges in yet another dream vision, wherein
Dastaguir conflates Zaynab’s dust covered body with his wife’s, with the latter asking for her apple-blossom scarf- a sign of her honour, which she/ they have lost because of Dastaguir.

Edward W. Said notes that persistent “extremely negative images [of Arabs and Islam]: the stereotypes of lustful, vengeful, violent, irrational, fanatical people” (qtd in Andrews, 30) became prevalent after 9/11, a conception which applies to the hyperbolized terrorist figure of Assef. “Media reports”, Andrews adds, “are demonstrated as powerful platforms for representing these figures, and the influence of terror is shown to be spread through media” (30). Amir recounts his first encounter with the Taliban when he returns to Afghanistan in terms of previous exposure through the media-TV, Internet, the cover of magazines, and in newspapers. Andrews comments that locating the terrorist as gaining power primarily through representation and image constructs the figure as either nonhuman or superhuman. He adds that during the encounter between Amir and Assef, Assef as the terrorist constructs his abysmal public display as “justice” and repositions his massacre of the Hazaras in Mazar-e-Sharaf in a positive light (20).

For Mir Hekmatullah Sadat The Kite Runner reflects the history of Afghanistan and the nation’s need for healing. Utilising the framework of national allegory, Sadat, unlike the non-Afghan reviewers states how the novel illuminates the inequalities and injustices that result from notions of ethnic difference (qtd in Lisa Winkler 15). However, Hassan’s real status as Amir’s half-brother, as well as Amir’s adoption of Sohrab, reflect, in the tradition of national allegory, a form of healing or union. Yet, ironically, this new relationship or union is fulfilled not in Afghanistan but in the United States.

While Amir finds his way of being good again, the Taliban continue to be ruthless in their racism, bigotry and carnage of Afghanistan. Bled in the past, first by the Soviet, followed by the in-fighting between Massoud, Rabbani and the mujahedin, causing losses to life particularized in Ali and Hassan’s deaths, Afghanistan continues to bleed. As Amir watches this war once again through the media, the twin towers come down and consequently America unleashes her war on terror.

The Kite Runner however offers a very different reaction to the 9/11 attacks as compared to Mohsin Hamid or Naqvi’s novels. Andrews observes that the rise of American nationalism symbolised by the omnipresence of the national flag seems to have little effect on Amir’s identity, and he does not mention any change in the way he, an Afghan-American man, is perceived in post-9/11 America (47). An event that shaped the identity of anyone who remotely resembled a Muslim seems to have no impact on Amir, except for a nostalgic melancholia that comments; “Soon after the attacks, America bombed Afghanistan, the
Northern Alliance moved in, and the Taliban scurried like rats into the caves. Suddenly, the novel states, people were standing in grocery store lines and talking about the cities of my childhood, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif” (*The Kite Runner*, 316). The 9/11 attacks and their aftermath also allow Amir to embrace his Afghan identity, by helping to restore a hospital on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan and even adopting Islam (yet none of these factors impact his identification with America (317-318), After the attacks, General Taheri also returns to Afghanistan to assume the ministry position which Soraya had once mocked him for hoping to return to (317). While Grant Andrews reads these events as showcasing a hopeful and positive reaction to the aftermath of the attacks, where Afghan identity seems to unproblematically flourish for the characters and they regain a sense of power, it is important to note the absence of Americans themselves in this final section of the novel(50). Irony, the intrinsic quality of Amir’s tale that has been functioning at an allegorical level enacts an exclusion of American faces. It comprises a dialogue of identity and representation only between Afghanistan and a microcosmic Afghan-American subculture. Afghanistan is inscribed onto America, thus while the physical space is an alienating foreign one, the metaphorical space is a home, albeit a microcosmic one, that functions as a mis-en-abyme to the novel’s utopian vision for the Afghan nation- where Hazaras and Pashtuns come together as one family under kite spanning skies, where lines that divide the privileged kite fliers and the powerless kite runners are erased, “a thousand times over” (*The Kite Runner* 323).

In the present of *Earth and Ashes* there are no such happy reunions. Dastaguir first cheated by the foreman, cannot believe his son’s lack of “sharm”. But when the foreman’s servant reassures him that Murad does not know about Abqul, Dastaguir leaves behind the “nang” (Dari word for honour) symbolized in the naswar box as, a reminder to Murad of his fragmented home. Perhaps Dastaguir’s sorrow which was like the “flowing of water” has now become the “time bomb, ready to explode”(15-16).This deeply symbolic text does not offer us neat conclusions that will mend and repair a war torn nation, but Rahimi troubles us with questions. Will Murad return to mourn and avenge, as Dastaguir hopes? Will he arm himself to seek retribution for the loss of his “earth” that the Russians have burnt to “ashes”? In a final act, Dastaguir replaces the naswar in his mouth with the earth that touched his son’s feet, thus “eating dirt” as Amir commands Hassan to do. What/Whom does Dastaguir believe? In this text where interpretations blur and coagulate, writing and effacing meanings, the answer lies in the tragic history that ensued. At the end of this small but layered novella, lies the scorched and burnt earth of Afghanistan, waiting to be blistered and scalded again.
this time not perhaps by pillaging outsiders but by Murads and Yassins of her “earth” who will reduce her to “ash” in an immediate present and the disastrous future.

In coalescing the personal and the political, *The Kite Runner* and *Earth and Ashes* particularly focus on the male characters and the corollary of the conflict in their lives whether it is exiled father and son figures or hyper masculine evil figures like Assef. Women in these novels are silenced victims, important as symbols of male honour, or voiceless within the text else shadowy figures like Sanaubari stereotypically portrayed. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Patience Stone* Hosseini and Rahimi narrate, the conflicts from the point of view of women, who appropriate the narrative and their marginal context gets centralized.

V

**Resisting Wars and Wrenching Powers from inside the home: Unarmed Women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the *Patience Stone***

*A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the story of two female protagonist, which traverses almost fifty years of the nation’s history, right up to its immediate present uses a third person narrative. As Afghanistan is ripped asunder in its rollercoaster wars, the women witness and are victimized by the war on two fronts in the text- as a political war, as a gender war. In the former men wage wars and the women observe and suffer the wars with and through them. In the latter the women are the transmitters of culture, signifiers of ethnic/ national difference and are used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic categories. In *The Patience Stone*, an unnamed woman initially nurses, prays for the recovery of her comatose husband. As the battle sounds unfold in a vague location amongst unidentified warring groups, the woman rages against structures that have repressed her and her kind – patriarchal institutions and its auxiliary arrangements- war, marriage, religion. To recount this tale where identities are nebulous, Atiq Rahimi uses a complex mode of narration, which combines tactics of what Henry Louis Gates calls “the speakerly text” and strategies from theatre (171). Corresponding to this subversive strategy while the woman has agency, voice, is active, transforming and destabilizing; oppressive structures are rendered passive, denied agency, are stagnant, restrained and disintegrating. Towards this the setting of the story is the tiny confined room where the man lies comatose and immobile. Within this still passive setting the woman’s actions, words and thoughts are the only instruments that can bring about alterations. The reader restrained by the third person narration, like the man has no view or
knowledge of what happens outside the home to the women. The dominant discourse is hoisted with its own petard for the marginalized will disclose its story only if she chooses to. Through this subversive narrative of the conflict, the patriarchal home and the world space are weakened at the foundation.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the initial phase of the conflict, the rise of Daoud, the death of Mir Akbar Khyber, the ensuing communist protest led by one of the PDPA leaders, Taraqi and the subsequent coming of the communist is narrated through the everyday life of Mariam. But this seminal history, consigned to the margin and the far-reaching changes, in Mariam’s life due to the alterations in Rasheed’s attitude is given centrality. The text also draws a contrast between the joyous welcome with which Laila’s birth is received on the night of April 1978 and Rasheed’s diminutive treatment of Mariam crystallized in his physical torture when he forces her to eat stones.

The Soviet occupation and their combat with the Mujahedeen are narrated through Laila’s family’s story. If Tariq’s lameness—(he loses his leg in a Russian land mine in 1981)—is an everyday reminder of the ongoing conflict, Fariba’s self-imposed exile to mourn the absence of Noor and Ahmad who have joined the fight against the Soviet’s is yet another fragment of history narrated through Laila. Ahmed and Noor’s story as Mujahedeen is not foregrounded but is reconstructed by their pining Mammy, Fariba, from biased and partial newspaper clippings that highlight the violence of the Russians while constructing the Mujahedeen as patriots. As Ahmed-Ghosh notes social traditionalism and economic underdevelopment of rural Afghanistan have repeatedly contested with the center, Kabul (10). For instance when Laila with her father and Tariq go to visit the Bamiyan Buddhas, she realizes that this rural surrounding is the Afghanistan of her Mujahedeen brothers Ahmed and Noor. This is where the real war was being waged. When they die in conflict, as the Mujahedeen (the ones who participated in Jihad), under Massoud, this patriot narrative leads to its natural conclusion in the title of “martyr-Shahid” that is given to them. Far from narrativizing this part of the story, we experience this martyrdom through Laila who can feel nothing for these Shahid brothers whom, of course she has never seen.

Though the Soviet’s departure is celebrated with camaraderie and fellow feeling, concretised in the party Mammy throws for the neighbourhood, the in-fighting between the Tajik kebab man and a Pashto that breaks the party anticipates the terrible internecine conflicts that break out in the aftermath of the Soviet departure. So, the Mujahedeen armed to the teeth lacking a common enemy turn on each other. Babi’s earlier anticipation of what ethnic differences between the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras can lead to is now felt
as rockets flash across Kabul’s skies and civilians die or are maimed. Tariq informs Laila like Rahim Khan notifies Amir in *The Kite Runner*, how streets are divided between these “warlords”. Laila with wretched irony comments on the changing assignation of these fighters. Not legitimized in their violence, the incensed power struggle between the warring groups leads to the people designating them as “warlord” or “tofangdar” (rifle men) or they smirking call them Mujahideen. Further the guerrillas are no longer fighting in the countryside but the battle is now on the streets blurring the lines between combatants and civilians. Through the restructuring of this position of these fighters from Mujahideen to warlords, Hosseini achieves two things. He is not only rejecting a dominant western universalism that sees all Islamic fighters as “Jihadist-terrorist” but notes the changing nature of the conflict.

With Ondaatje, Hosseini seems to be observing, in the Afghan context, “The reason for war is now war”. But this political platform outside with its overarching scales of power, domination and control is articulated from below, primarily through Laila. Thus perception of the socio-political and socio-cultural conflicts of the centre is by peripheral and marginalized groups like Gati’s mother who runs up and down streets collecting pieces of Gati’s flesh in an apron. With her childhood friend and classmate, Gati’s death, the war closes in on Laila culminating in Tariq’s departure and her parent’s death.

If *A Thousand Splendid Suns* narrates seminal historical events through the eyes of the marginalized, *The Patience Stone* disempowers history and the male world of war and military masculinities and prioritizes her story, the story of the unnamed woman. This it does by disarming war and men and by arming the woman. In leaving the woman nameless, the woman represents collective- Afghan women; women, as the book’s preface tells us, who have been repressed by centuries of rigid norms and conventions. While Hosseini’s novel spans thirty years of war, naming the belligerents, Rahimi blurs all temporal and spatial identities, beginning with his epigraph which states “somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere” (epigraph, *The Patience Stone*). This indistinctness traverses through the text when bombs explode “somewhere” (*The Patience Stone*15) in the city, answered by counterattacks. At other times we are told how “some are yelling, some crying and some firing their Kalashnikovs” (*The Patience Stone*25). This fuzzy narration continues even when the conflict reaches the woman’s immediate neighbourhood wherein her neighbour, an old woman’s house is reduced to wrack and ruin. But what is narrativized is not the sound of rockets and explosions, but the rasping cough of the old woman and her trauma of the conflict that drives her to ranting insanity (*The Patience Stone*, 45).
This equivocal representation can be perceived in the conflation of religion and war. Like the announcer in Girish Karnad’s *Tughlaq*, the Mullah’s voice is used to show how those in power manipulate and distort religion to legitimise their war as jihad. (*The Patience Stone* 25-26). The Mullah’s meandering announcement that moves between the revelation of Prophet Salih, the cursed race of Thamoud and the drowning of the Pharaoh distorts the hadith to allow what he in fact says is disallowed “weapon furnishing” (30). The Mullah’s voice acts like a backdrop to what is foregrounded in the text- the woman’s refusal to pray. When religious fanaticism and fundamentalism takes over the streets, and religion is used to arm inter-tribal clash, the woman stops praying. She rejects religion manipulated by masculine structures, hence will not unfurl her mat and pray, at the Mullah’s call for prayer.

“If the nation is an imagined community”, says Ania Loomba, “then that imagining is profoundly gendered” (180). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini shows how as warring group’s dispute over affecting tradition or modernity on the body politic of the nation this clash is contested on the body of the woman. Dr. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh observes that two critical epochs in Afghan history have shaped gender dynamics and affected women’s status in Afghanistan. The first period took place during the reign of Amanullah in 1923 and included rapid reforms to improve women’s lives and women’s position in the family. The reforms met with widespread protest from religious groups and contributed to the ultimate demise of Amanullah’s reign. The second period occurred under the leadership of the communist-backed Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). This leadership forced an agenda of social change to empower women that led to the ten-year war between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, the birth of the Mujahedeen, and the decline of women’s status. Laila’s father Hakim, the university educated teacher, a freethinking liberalist and a campaigner for woman’s education lives through both these phases. Believing primarily in educationally qualifying his daughter, he points out the advantage women have under the rule of the communist “…it’s a good time to be a woman in Afghanistan. And you take advantage of that Laila”(121). Many Afghan texts like Latifa’s *My Forbidden Face*, Sulima and Hala’s oral accounts to Batya Swift Yasgur comment on what Hakim states about one of the reasons for the war between the Russians and the Mujahedeen- woman’s freedom and the supposed godless communist interference with it. This motif acquires centrality in Siba Shakib *Afghanistan where Gods Only Come to Weep*, where Shirin–Gol’s education becomes a site of dispute between the Mujahedin and the Russian, a clash from whose discourse Shirin–Gol herself disappears. But this development and advancement of the woman, Hosseini and other writers note was restricted to urban spaces not so in the rural and tribal areas.
Far from offering a univocal picture of Afghanistan as an Islamic Fundamentalist state, the text to some extent shows the heterogeneity of the nation in the rural-urban difference. As Rasheed later points out cynically to Laila, for women in rural Afghanistan, control over their lives and gender roles is determined by patriarchal kinship arrangements, unlike urban Tajiks like Laila. The text also shows how through men like Rasheed patriarchal society’s unmitigated power over women becomes evident even in an urbanscape like Kabul. Thus while Hakim allows Fariba complete freedom, Rasheed jails Mariam in a tortuous marriage, Hakim sends Laila to school, Rasheed schools Mariam on the statutes of restraints. In the text even before the Mujahedeen and the Taliban take over the woman’s body as a cultural religious code, Rasheed inscribes the same state politics on the bodies of his wives. Rasheed’s control over Mariam begins with imposing a blue burka on her. In lines that highlight his patriarchal dominance and ownership of his wife’s body, Rasheed differentiates himself from the rich men in Kabul and Hakim who according to him have no moral qualms in protecting their women synechdocally represented as “nang” or “namus”. While Mariam initially is taken aback by Rasheed’s possessive nature, by constructing Rashid in terms of a protective male figure who has provided her sanctuary, she reinterprets his restrictions and impositions, whether his imposing the burka on her or excluding her from his male friends. She continues to look for signs of a bond between Rasheed and herself. She comes across his gun and tells herself that he has it for “their safety, her safety” (A Thousand Splendid Suns, 74). However with her inability to placate Rasheed’s stereotypical demand for a male heir, she incurs first his disregard then his abuse.

Having established early on that Rasheed is not an orthodox Muslim, but someone who twists his faith to suit his logic, the text thus dislocates his physical abuse of Mariam and Laila from a religious space (A Thousand Splendid Suns 71). Rasheed’s warped, selective and crafty interpretations of tribal codes like “nang”, or later the “melmastia” (hospitality) and “nanawatai” (asylum) he provides Laila, microcosmically represents what the Mujahedeen and subsequently the Taliban carried out macrocosmically. If his beating his wives and boarding their windows anticipates the gender apartheid of the Taliban, his lechery and lust characterizes the perilous position of the women during the Mujahedeen war.

Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood comment on how American feminists who focused on only the Taliban, constantly ignored the devastation wrought by two decades of warfare in which women and children had suffered most heavily (339). Hosseini’s text does not privilege this does not fall into the stereotypical pre-Taliban vs. post-Taliban binary, portraying a relatively benign picture of women’s lives prior to Taliban. Huma Ahmed-
Ghosh states that the period from 1992-1996 saw unprecedented barbarism by the Mujahedeen, where stories of killings, rapes, amputations and other forms of violence were told daily. To avoid rape and forced marriages, young women were resorting to suicide (10). Hala narrates in her oral testimony the fear, insecurity and loss of homes and lives when the Mujahidin fought each other.

Rasheed uses this public situation to gratify his personal lust for the young Laila. As he narrates his desire to marry the teenager, to the outraged and devastated Mariam, he contextualizes it in the perilous world outside. Constructing his lamentable act as charitable and laudable, he sees himself as one who is providing two things for Laila—things unattainable in the hazardous times—“a husband and a home”. He relates a ghastly and hideous portraiture of the dangers like rape, desolation and even death that might befall Laila, if she’s to step out from his home into the world. It is thus the protector gambit (the very image Mariam had once cherished) that Rasheed uses to materialise the marriage. Later in the novel, during a similar state of affairs, Rasheed, who is suspicious of Aziza’s parenthood, uses the despotism of the Taliban to threaten Laila into submission.

Even as Rasheed is misunderstood by Mariam as a protector, several political science scholars, like Michael Rubin and others comment on how the rise of the Taliban was accompanied by heady optimism. Rubin comments how everyone from teachers to gravediggers believed that the Taliban promised two things, security and an end to the conflict between rival Mujahidin groups that continued to wrack Afghanistan through the 1990s (14). This hope is anticipated in both Hosseini’s novels, by Rahim Khan in The Kite Runner and a smiling Laila in A Thousand Splendid Suns, who announces with joy “the Taliban are here” (244). Other Afghan texts like the oral narrative of Hala also recounts how Hala’s mother felt that at least her daughters will be safe at home. Hala similarly narrates a popular myth that surrounded the Taliban then that they had come together as a force to rescue a girl abducted by the Mujahedeen. In Hosseini’s texts, despite this initial merriment, the novels anticipate the Taliban’s persecution and harrying through subaltern figures, the Hazara Hassan in the former and the terrified Aziza, Laila’s daughter in the latter who cries at the public spectacle of the mangled, brutalized body of Najibullah. Soon this brutality is written on the body of the woman in the name of Islamic westoxication and the Taliban dictates the woman’s movement, needs, aspirations and spheres of existence. With the coming of the Taliban, public and private spaces collide in the novel’s representation of how history and individual lives are constantly interlinked in the persecution of the woman.
In edicts that legitimise the exclusion of women from public life, the Taliban, like their precursor Rasheed in the novel twist the Koran in order to enforce laws that are highly restrictive to supposedly restore the Islamic balance that was upset by incursions from the West. A political scholar, Anastasia Telesetky observes how from their inception, the Taliban have passed diktats that have divided the country into public and private spheres. To implement the separation of women from public life, the Taliban ban women from the work force and education system, and mandate certain dress and behaviour codes (294). When Laila protests, Mariam can see the inanity in her remonstration, for what the Taliban have imposed in a public sphere is what Rasheed has already achieved in a private sphere. From cultural signifiers the Taliban move on to the heart of Afghan cultures destroying museums, poetry books, musical instruments and subsequently the Buddhas of Bamiyan. Rasheed neither unduly different from nor affected, by the Taliban, regards them with wry amusement, regaling in their public spectacle of torture and savagery.

In keeping with its design of imprecision and indistinctness *The Patience Stone*, unlike *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, names none of its male characters. All men are identified concurrent to their relationship with the woman as her husband, father, father-in-law or her brother-in-law while the woman is always identified as “the woman” and never according to the patriarchal roles assigned to her. Within this deliberate device of the novel that negates the centre’s identity, these male figures represent different aspects of a patriarchal structure that utilizes and exploits the woman’s body and her sexuality an exploitation that the woman systematically undermines.

The woman’s oppression begins in the hands of her obscene quail—stroking father. The episode of the quail that he fosters is laden with phallic overtones. The centrality of the quail in her father’s life which marginalizes all the women in the family—his wife and his seven daughters suggest the phallogocentrism of the father which holds the male point of view as central. Within this discourse he takes over the meaning of the woman’s body, interpreting it as chattel, to be dispensed off to pay back his debts incurred through his quail betting.

From the patriarch the woman is handed over to a patriarchal structure: the institution of marriage. The marriage itself is orchestrated on the treatise of war that constructs the man as a hero, which authorizes his absence from a ceremony centered on the nonexistent man, unmindful of the living, breathing woman. The symbiosis of sexism and militarism in the woman’s marriage to the Khanjar, which Bernt Glatzer calls a double edged sword, given to boys after they attain puberty, places the woman within the male paradigms of war (85).
masculine discourse constructs “our women’s” chastity as a fragile location which the male have to defend against the onslaught of the “other” men. In the man’s absence his mother acts as a substitute to man the woman’s chastity. Ironically the sexist, militarist male subject whom the Khanjar represents, is unable to demonstrate his masculinity in both the spaces-marriage and war -for clumsy and impotent in the marital bed; he is no martial male either. Thus doubly disempowered he is unable to wield his “weapon” in the open battlefront or in the enclosed nuptial bed. In stating how the man was injured in a petty quarrel, shot over an insult, the woman demystifies any iconic image of the jihadist we might have construed in our mind on seeing this comatose man. In being neither completely dead nor fully alive the man has further left the woman unaided, for if he had died his brothers would have married the woman, thus legitimizing their adulterous lechery for the woman’s body. Now the woman and her family have been abandoned by his mother and his brothers. The marriage however turns out to be a double-edged weapon that on the one hand disempowers and disarms the woman, at the same time the woman empowers and arms herself within this structure and falters its power to diminish.

The unconscious body of the man literalizes the cold unconsciousness of the system he represents which with its binding ideology, curbs and constrains the woman in multiple ways. Though the text does not delimit the woman’s movement, the woman has been conditioned to receive the man as the linchpin that holds her life and so persistently returns to minister to him to heal him. It is this complicity with her oppressor thus allowing herself to be subordinated that the woman has to break away from before she arms herself against these systems.

Hosseini’s agenda being not to merely represent the woman as the silenced veiled object, but to recover the voice and agency of the repressed woman subject, therefore creates space in the text for his women to maneuver against their antagonists by flouting the wishes of their oppressors and empowering themselves to fight back and protect each other. Mariam and Laila choose to work within systems that try to marginalize them. In a layered socio-political set up that marginalizes them, despite the myriad traumas the two undergo, their sense of self remains integral. While Mariam acquires agency and voice through the course of the novel, Laila, once she marries Rasheed actively arms herself with a façade of passivity. Initially Mariam resigns herself to suffering and finds that image in Nana who compares the quiet endurance of women to the silent snowflakes. Though Rasheed is inhuman to her Mariam is never de-humanized. That Rasheed terrifies Mariam with the dangers that might befall Laila in the Mujahedeen ravaged streets of Kabul, to win her consent for the marriage,
speaks volumes about Mariam’s compassion and empathy. Never a submissive figure Laila subverts the lust and conceited masculine arrogance of Rasheed that Laila desires her, to legitimize her unborn child with paternal name and protection in perilous times. She also cleverly cuts her finger on the night of her wedding to make-believe her pretended loss of virginity through Rasheed. Though Rasheed suspects Aziza is not his daughter Laila is fiercely protective of Aziza, a defense Rasheed cannot fight. While initially hostile to each other the two women’s intensely protective bonding begins when Laila unarms Rasheed who attempts to whip Mariam with his belt. If Laila unarms Rasheed, the baby Aziza draws Mariam with a love that Mariam has never thought was her right to demand.

As the violence persists and men fight senseless battles, the two women become aware of the need to survive. While the country disintegrates, the women assert their identity through their closeness and amity and arm themselves to fight patriarchs within and without home. Laila steals from Rasheed to make good her escape from him, an adventure in which she takes Mariam as well. This fails for male figures unarm Laila and Mariam at different points. The Mujahedeen rule that the woman be accompanied by a mahram; a male escort requires them to seek the aid of a stranger who promises to help but betrays them to the Mujahidin. Though thrown once again into the clutches of Rasheed who, through the years steadily punishes them with threats and beatings Mariam and Laila do not disintegrate. Miriam Cooke’s comments about women in other war contexts can be stated of Mariam and Laila as well. “Unlike the unravelling world around them” they show “a collective responsibility to their family” and are “never weakened throughout”, a quality evident at several points in the novel (Cooke, 290). Though Rasheed is despicable, Laila cannot abort his child. As Cooke notes, “Unlike men who relentlessly wage war, women uncompromisingly campaign for peace” (290).

In their oral testimonies, Sulima and Hala narrate many stories of valorous male and female doctors who treated women, despite the Taliban’s proscriptions. Latifa similarly recounts how her mother a doctor secretly treated rape victims and girls subjected to sexual torture. Hosseini likewise narrates Mariam and Laila’s traumatizing exertions in the unsanitary deplorable hospital for women. If through Laila who goes through a C-Section without anaesthesia, he shows one kind of strength, through the unnamed female doctor’s courage to treat her women patients Hosseini illustrates another kind of might. The image of the doctor delivering in her burka with her attendant nurse on her Taliban watch remains with us as a picture of the strength and solidarity of the Afghan women despite their subjection to inhuman treatment. Like Hala and Latifa many women ran private schools to educate
children, at great risk, but these women could achieve it owing to supportive male figures at home. Aziza however receives such an education in the orphanage run by Zaman.

If the text shows the young and urbanised Laila as rebellious, Mariam is the stronghold from whence Laila’s prowess draws its strength. Rebecca Stuhr remarks on the hybrid role of knight-martyr that Mariam plays in saving Laila’s life when Rasheed tries to strangle her and later sacrifices her life so that Laila can live the life she wanted. Her killing of Rasheed is the ultimate assertion of her sense of self. She calls his name and wants him to watch as she strikes him down. Stuhr also offers her reasons why Mariam has to be penalised for the murder of Rasheed. She states, “However evil Rasheed might have been, in killing him Mariam has deprived Zalmai of his father and for this crime Mariam will meet her punishment in the hands of another patriarch the Taliban” (63).

Rebecca Stuhr observes that thoughts of her loved ones are in her mind as Mariam goes to her death. Yet Mariam draws strength from prayer that has always been her refuge and her strength. Mariam’s death, significantly, does not end the book (64). Stuhr also comments that Hosseini rather than focusing on Mariam’s action as sacrifice and martyrdom emphasises the practicality of Mariam’s act. Mariam’s action is heroic, but, as the narrative suggests, she is doing what mothers have always done and continue to do for the sake of their families and children. Stuhr observes that Mariam has chosen death so that Laila and the children, together with Tariq, can find a sanctuary where they will thrive in peace and security (65-66).

Though Laila pursues Mariam’s advice and she and Tariq, with her two children, go to Murree in Pakistan, eventually, Laila chooses to leave this shelter to return to Kabul. In this final portion of the narrative, Stuhr suggests Laila’s character evolves out of the remains of her childhood and into a mature woman who is able to make her own sacrifices, this time on behalf of Afghanistan and Kabul (66). After the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent American invasion, Laila begins to hear about changes in Kabul, the rebuilding of roads and schools and improvements for women, and she wants to be a part of it. She retains the ambition instilled in her by her father. She recalls his words and wants to fulfil them: “You can be anything you want, Laila, he says, “I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you” (343).

Unlike Anil who takes the flight back and “hits the circuit” or Amir who chooses a private retribution, Laila returns to her homeland to rebuild and reconstruct. Mariam’s sacrifice is infused into Laila’s purpose and the reconstruction of Kabul. Their stories become part of the continuing narrative of Afghanistan. Mariam’s sacrifice gives Laila a sense of
purpose and allows her to grow beyond the tragedies she has experienced and to choose to devote her life to others and towards the restoration of Kabul and Afghanistan. Further the text does not close on a romantic creation of a pre-war Kabul, but depicts how those in powers, the Northern Alliance was the earlier Mujahidin, and danger is still an ever-present reality. But Laila like Sulima and Latifa believes the future of the nation lies in education and empowering the next generation through books and not through arms. The wish with which Latifa concludes her autobiography is what Hosseini imaginatively fulfils through Laila at the end of his novel, “As soon as the last Taliban has hung up his black turban, and I can be a free woman in a free country, I’ll return to my Afghanistan and take up my duties as a citizen, a woman—and I hope one day as a mother” (179-180).

Not an archetypal saintly, asexual, maternal figure the woman in The Patience Stone is a complex, brave, resilient but nevertheless flawed human being. The radical voice of this woman who speaks for women, who have been marginalised, scorned and silenced for centuries, is addressed to those who dominate her. She arms herself in front of the silenced, paralysed combatant, erstwhile Jihadist husband, through her speech, her actions, her body and her religion (spaces customarily presumed to be under the man’s control and ownership). Trapped as she is in a complex socio-political cultural context, the woman initially attempts to assimilate into the hegemony’s shallow, empty version of what woman can and must do and so her opening words are the prayerful “Al-Qatar”. Religious scholar Dr Muhammad Ratib An-Nabulsi states that “Al-Qahhar” is the emphatic word for His (Allah’s) name which means the “Irresistible Subduer”, the one who subdues and vanquishes overwhelmingly everything and anything. In praying according to the Mullah’s directive and for her husband’s recovery to a Divine figure perceived as “Subduer and Vanquisher”, she imitates the master’s voice in more ways than one. In the sixteen days that have elapsed before the narrative begins, the man has been the subject and the woman has devalued herself to the object, breathing according to the man, measuring time according to the man’s breaths and the telling of the prayer beads.

Bell Hooks comments on when a woman’s oppositional narrative begins. In The Patience Stone the woman “having identified the forces which exploit and suppress, oppress and dominate her, the woman’s voice creates the oppositional counter-discourse” (Hooks, 28). This liberated voice, transforms her consciousness, her very being and she moves from being the object to being the subject. Viewing the man as the object leads to her self-recovery where she can see herself as the suffering traumatised subject and not her wounded husband,
who has never suffered though injured. By objectifying and thence silencing the man, the woman speaks back to her oppressor and recovers her voice silenced through ten years of marriage and sufferance. One can observe in Hooks’ words that the woman in order to “reconcile and renew her identity that had been thwarted” the woman speaks about “her multiple subversions of the system that thought it had subordinated her” (29). By speaking about her subversions she as Hooks notes “restores and recovers her sense of self that has always existed prior to her exploitation and within oppressive practices” (29). In order to restore her sense of “self” to a condition of wholeness, she must, to quote Hooks “find the dismembered parts of her body, quartered, estranged and assaulted by dominating structures and refuse to be thus dispersed” (29-30).

The woman’s body is constructed, controlled and manipulated in an attempt to reinforce gender norms in relation to masculinity and femininity. One important means of disciplining woman’s body relates to menstruation. O’Keefe remarks that menstruation and menstrual blood are patriarchal society’s cultural taboos, which regulate all things menstrual to the private realm. She adds that menstruation is a matter that a woman is expected to keep to herself-hidden and invisible and proper menstrual etiquette should ensure a sense of fear, embarrassment and shame for the woman when it comes to menstruation (536). Viewed as dirty, vile and polluting, menstruation and menstrual blood become in the hands of the woman in Rahimi’s novel a weapon of resistance, an effective instrument of war. Far from becoming an area of vulnerability for woman in a powerless position, in the hands of the woman it becomes an indomitable mechanism to avow her exclusive power. When the Mullah arrives the woman lies that she is menstruating to avoid praying. The mullah who sees it as the ultimate form of dirt leaves not wanting to be defiled and therefore refuses to enter the personal space of the woman (her home). In making, in O’Keefe’s words, “visible what should be hidden” the woman shames and embarrasses the Mullah, thus she is able to ward off this unwanted trespasser from her private realms (536). But this is not the first time that she has used her “impure blood” as a site of resistance. Tutored by her aunt, the woman on her first nuptial night with her husband projects her menstrual blood as virginal blood. Though a virgin, by casting her (what the man sees as) “impure” blood as “pure blood”, the woman takes control of her bodily function to challenge the marriage system. As she recounts this act of disruption and empowerment in the past, the woman plunges her finger into her vagina, and makes visible to the man the blood he thought was unclean. In making him smell it and then smearing it in his beard, the woman directly challenges societal norms. Refusing
to feel what O’Keefe calls the instituted “menstrual etiquette”, rather than be an object of discipline and normalization that should be ashamed and mortified about her “dirt”; the woman flaunts it as dignifying, honourable and “clean” (540).

In most war contexts the woman’s sexuality is used as a weapon against her, the woman in The Patience Stone uses her sexuality and her body as a shield to protect her honour, as a way of satiating her desires and as a strategy to emasculate her man. When the three armed men break into the house and loot it of the Koran, the man’s watch and wedding ring after having rifled through every personal and intimate space in the house, they bring into plain view, that which is respectable and should be hidden – the woman’s undergarment. Commenting on her body parts the soldiers sexualize the raid through this gross and unwarranted violation of privacy. Later when two of these men reappear, the woman, who is unaware of their previous visit, uses the very same body they intend to defile, to force them off of her.

Miranda Allison points out that in contemporary armed conflict rape is not indiscriminate rape but intentionally committed by specific men against specific women and is directed at a military objective. During times of conflict, Allison elaborates, multiple binary constructions are formed: masculine vs. feminine, “our women” contrasted with their women and “our men vs. “their” men. “Our” women are chaste and honourable to be protected by “our” men, while “their” women are unchaste and depraved. The war effort is directed at saving “our” women from “their” men who would rape and murder “our” women (85). It is to this narrative of war and the ethnicised war time construction of masculinity that the woman resorts. When the older man asks the woman regarding herself the woman constructs herself first as “our” (the man’s) women, thereby requiring the stranger to protect her from the dishonor of rape and offense. However when this does not seem to curb the man’s intention, which the woman has understood, she turns the tables on him by casting herself as a prostitute. The woman uses the dynamics of rape – a phenomenon rooted in inequality, discrimination and misogyny - against the man. As the woman later tells her husband when a man rapes a virgin, it is to show his domination and aggression(The Patience Stone, 82). The politics of subordination and control do not operate with the prostitute as paying her reverses the roles of the dominator and the subjugated. The strange man defiant, furious departs after spewing curses at her.

Heterosexuality that presupposes dominance because of the very structure of the male genital organ and the female genital organs is disparaged by the woman. Debunking hegemonic rhetoric the woman scoffs at the exclusive male sexual organ and its supremacist
function of aggressive penetration of the recipient female genital organ. (*The Patience Stone* 105) The phallus, often associated with the Khanjar in the text, amalgamates as commented on earlier male sexuality, war and the heterosexual act. It is this phallocentric military male subject the woman derides and contests by asserting her sexuality and executing its needs. The woman challenges what Anne Koedt in “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm” calls female “frigidity” by remonstrating how the man, her husband, never let her climax since he never saw her as an individual in any context, leave alone acknowledging her desire to share equally in the sexual act. As a rebellion she taunts him by using his body for her sexual fantasies and then emasculating it by sleeping with the young soldier. She displaces her husband and usurps power by disallowing him any of the prerogatives society might have sanctioned him over her body. Anne Koedt lists the functions of the vagina as menstruation, receiving the penis, holding the semen and as the birth passage. If the woman uses her menstruation as a form of resistance she supplants the man’s sexuality and proves his impotency by allowing herself to be impregnated by another man. In the climactic part of the text, the woman narrates her last ditch effort to save her marriage, threatened as she was, by her mother-in-law’s efforts to get her son a second wife as the woman was barren(*The Patience Stone* 132). Under the direction of her aunt’s pimp, the woman sleeps with a stranger to conceive, not once but twice. She is therefore glad she has daughters as a son would have torn her secrets from within, destroying her as is the wont of men. By reproducing military male strategies of forced impregnation however in her case by taking control over her body, the woman dislodges the man’s Khanjar, disparaging its manifold connotations like honour, male potency and power(112). In a community were identity is patrilineal, the daughters conceived of this “illicit” relationship which clouts the ultimate masculinity of the man whose children now bear the ethnicity of their mother’s coital partner.

The woman’s monologues are non-chronological, moving between her past and her present. Resurrecting and “actively remembering” a past which she had once deliberately silenced, she now purposefully re-enacts it in the present. She refuses to keep her past as past, in what cultural memory critics have identified as its “archive” but actively circulates her memory, which in Assmann’s words “keeps the past present as the canon” (99). Initially unable to understand this surge of memory and protest she later sees it as a “voice from one high…. And the voice coming out of my throat is a voice buried for thousands of years” (*The Patience Stone* 129) This memory/voice would be denied representation within a majoritarian discourse as disruptive and confrontational, however the woman states, must be voiced, needs to be narrativized (129). In order to authorize her-story and silence his/story she chooses the
site of myth as her penultimate act of rebellion. The myth of the Patience Stone becomes a way of writing her story and the collective denied and buried history of other women like her and her aunt into what Assmann identifies as the “cultural capital of her society” (100). The myth handed down to her by her father-in-law is the myth of Syngue Sabour of Persian mythology. Elaborating the myth in one of his interviews, Rahimi states that the Stone is a magical one that receives the problems of those who confide in it. According to this myth when the stone has absorbed all the pain and suffering of the person, it will shatter and free the individual from his/her woes. In his last days of feverish agitation, the father-in-law sees the Patience Stone as the Ka’aba stone in Mecca. Though not popularly called the Patience stone scholars like An-Nabulsi state that some Muslims believe that the stone was originally pure and dazzling white but has subsequently turned black because of the sins of the people. In making her husband the Patience Stone calling him “my Syngue Sabour” and herself the confider who has made him live these many days through the confessions of her sins, the woman writes herself into the cultural working memory of her society (The Patience Stone 74). By seeing her husband as the Sang-e-Sabour she gives the nameless man highest meaning and value, in Assmann’s words a “sanctified status” a canonization consecrated on him because of the woman’s confession (100). Abrogating the man’s hegemony she reverses the Scheherazade motif, for here the man lives another day, on account of her confession.

In her final insurgency, the woman metafictionally endorses herself as the Authorized Voice, the man’s messenger, his Prophet like her father-in-law says Khadija, and the Prophet’s wife should have been (The Patience Stone 134). As the authorized voice she states since all religion is based on a revelation, “our story” within which her story in particular which has been a revelation of pain, wounds and secrets is also a religion. In this religion she designates him “Al-Sabour”, the ninety ninth name of Allah, which means the Patient One and she is his voice, gaze and hands- his agent, without whom he is powerless. As an endorsement of the power of the woman’s confession, the text brings the man to life to enable the release of the woman’s suffering. Within this subversive text, the concluding act when the woman plunges the Khanjar into the man rendering him passive without her undermines the man’s power even when he tries to throttle the woman.

The spatio-temporal dynamics of And the Mountains Echoed is wider and larger than Hosseini’s earlier novels. A novel more about families, relationships and survival the many wars recede into a distant backdrop. As Hosseini acknowledges, the title of the novel from Blake’s “Nurse’s Song” suggests the transition from innocence to experience. Unlike the “hills” in Blake’s poem, Hosseini’s “Mountains” suggest the Afghan topography and
momentous events that echo through the novel and ripple outwards, affecting the lives of people not even born yet.

Saboor’s myth, with which, the novel begins acts like a preface to what would happen to Pari. Unlike the cultural roots of Sohrab and Rostam, Saboor’s story is an imaginative account narrating allegorically Saboor’s inconsolable grief at the act he was about to perform. This narrative beginning is a shift from the realism of the earlier novels. Further by self-reflexively suggesting the fictional quality of the story, the novel signifies other ambivalences as well. Rigid binaries like the evil Assef and the innocent Hassan, the malicious Rasheed and the suffering Mariam no longer operate. As Nabi points out in his letter to Markos there is no difference between the looting, plundering warring sides. The novel also metafictionally rejects, through Nabi, the wars as the Muse from which writings will spring. The surfeit of writings on the wars Nabi states has jaded the space making it almost a cliché and through Nabi’s accelerated narration the wars are cynically observed.

However in some sections of the novel, the anticipated romantic reconstruction motif of A Thousand Splendid Suns is deliberately thwarted. The story of Babajan the said re-builder of Shadbagh is a case in point. Narrated using the deliberate perspective of Adel, his vision of his father gradually moves from idealism to disillusionment to acceptance. Adel initially sees his father as a provider, restorer who has refurbished Shadbagh with hospitals, schools, enabling lives and so on. Adel is a veritable prisoner in the protective fortress that Baba has built to protect Adel and his young wife and longs like Amir for his Baba to be home with him. When he finds Gholam (Iqbal’s son) in one of his escapades, Adel’s world gradually falls apart. An ex-Mujahidin, Baba it turns out is some kind of a mafia head in Afghanistan’s notorious narcotics sphere. Like the many powerful dons who came to rule when Karzai took over as the leader, Baba is one such. In retaining Adel’s perspective the novel does not make explicitly visible the offences Baba commits like the seemingly innocuous cotton factory in Hermand or his mysterious treatment of the old man, who we later deduce is Iqbal. But Baba’s oppression and ruthless acts against the innocent is insinuatingly narrated by Gholam, who tells Adel that the Narcotic Palace stands on what was his family’s land. He also exposes the manipulative strategies of Baba who buys the judge who was trying Iqbal’s case. Iqbal is also killed by Baba as he mysteriously disappears – a disappearance narrated by Pari towards the end of the novel and in the broken frame of the old man’s glasses found at the scene of his death.
Quite another post—Taliban scene is narrated through Markos and other foreign-aid workers. The story of Roshi traumatically attacked by her uncle represents how acts of violence continue within the enclosed spaces of home. Like the villa San Guiralamo in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, which transforms into different spaces through the course of the war, the Wahdati house now handed down by its owner to Nabi becomes a sort of a shelter for doctors and nurses who arrive in Afghanistan to restore war ravaged children. Nabi who allows these foreign—aid workers to stay rent free is also contrasted with Idris and Timur who exploit the war conditions. Thus in his latest novel Hosseini has moved into newer areas some of which are fall-out of the conflicts and the rather romanticized view of victims of armed conflict has become more multi-faceted.

VI

**The Translated Men - Hosseini and Rahimi as Exiles.**

Salman Rushdie states that the word “translation” comes from the Latin “being borne’ across”. Having been borne across from Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, Hosseini and Rahimi are in Rushdie’s words “translated men” (17). Being exiles who voluntarily left before the wars escalated they view their homeland through “guilt-tinted spectacles”(Rushdie 17). In many of their interviews Hosseini and Rahimi state that though they did not witness from beginning to end the full scope of the ongoing hostilities in their country, the very fact that they chose to flee made them aware that while some like them could escape the brutalities, others could not. As survivors, in that sense, in their texts these writers reveal simultaneously a culpability that they did not remain to see their nation through yet a certain relief that they could circumvent the confrontations in their nation overpowers them, with a concurrent gratitude towards their host land – that harbored them. This is reflected in the “dialectical “characters whose stories, Hosseini and Rahimi narrativise ; some like Amir and Baba who were fortunate to have left, some others like Laila with their loyalty to their homeland, bravely remained and some others who can never escape the stronghold of imposing structures like Dastaguir, Murad and the woman in *The Patience Stone*. Straddling between the desire and imagination to write about a homeland ravaged by war, between the guilt and the relief, that they left their homeland, they witness through their fiction and fictional characters, albeit from a distance, the Afghan wars in its myriad forms.

The Norwegian scholar Oyvind Gulliksen uses the metaphor of “double landscape” to study the intellectual and emotional life of exiles(8). Hosseini and Rahimi’s double landscapes - belonging to the West (the former lives in America and the latter in France) and
to Afghanistan is reflected in, what cultural memory critics like Erll have identified, as their “modes of remembering” the histories of the war (19). The layered medium of allegory and myth through which the armed conflicts are viewed, foregrounds the story of the individual. This visible narrative carries with it the second distinct recording of history. The desire to acutely behold and intensely experience the trauma they have escaped, leads to a microscopic focus on the personal and the private, with history unraveling irrepressibly on a larger canvas beyond the control of the victims of the conflict. This personal allegorically represents the historical, whether its individuals like Dastaguir and Baba, Amir and Murad who represent generations of Afghan subjects, or episodes like Hassan’s rape or objects like the apple blossom scarf that reflect traumatic history and a problematic heritage. Overland views the mind of the exilic subject as “palimpsestically layered” (9). In the Afghan novels however the “palimpsestically layered” mind of the exilic subject however cannot hold these double or plural tiers disjointedly for long as the political collides with the personal in compound ways. Not having experienced the histories of the armed conflict, the frame of myth enables an imaginative reconstruction of a past and its relevance to the writers present. Myths, whether of Sohrab and Rostam or of the Sang-e Sabour become the sites that facilitate a remembering of a past- distant and immediate.

In order to remember and perceive through these mediums, Hosseini and Rahimi use characters like themselves- displaced, de-centered, marginalized and transfer their conscientious need to remember on to their characters. Within this remembering “active forgetting” is deliberately replaced by “active remembering”. This acute desire not to forget ensues in remembering those who are written out, erased or are displaced by history – subalternized by the nation owing either to their ethnicity or gender.

Hosseini and Rahimi through their subaltern figures be it Laila, Mariam, Hassan, or the unnamed woman challenge the essentialist rhetoric of the cultural nationalisms posited by different warring groups. Claiming to return the nation to its cultural origins- identities rooted unalterably in their ethnic heritage and blood ties like “nang”, “namus” or “badal”, oppressive warring groups allegorically represented through the Assefs and the Rasheeds, insistently encode these nationalisms on the bodies of women and ethnic minorities like the Hazaras. Like Hosseini depicts, all other cultural products be it art or architecture are considered deviant and against their watan.

As exiles Hosseini and Rahimi argue for in McClennen’s words an “alternative cultural nationalism” (27). In choosing primarily the perspective of the oppressed within different war contexts subordinated by different systems their position is that their story
would be suppressed by these systems, which can therefore be narrated only in exile. But the dialectics of their exilic position, being what Rushdie calls plural and partial they incorporate seemingly contradictory strategies to challenge the ethnic cultural nationalisms. On the one hand they attempt to remap an Afghan cultural identity to debunk post-9/11 dominant a Western discourse of Afghanistan on the other hand construction of any restrictive cultural nationalism is highly problematic as it involves imposition of statutes and laws. This key tension in challenging and creating cultural nationalism is thought out by Hosseini and Rahimi in irreconcilable anti-theses, with contradictory concepts coexisting in tension within the same work.

In his first two novels, the stereoscopic/double perspective of Hosseini functions in rigid binaries: innocent victims vs. ghoulish tormentors, old Afghanistan—exotic Utopia vs. dystopian Afghanistan of his immediate past, benevolent males vs. tyrannical males. Hosseini however like Rushdie comments about the exilic writer, “falls between the two stools” in attempting to straddle across these binaries (12).

It is through an older generation like Baba and Hakim, Hosseini constructs the cultural splendor of Afghanistan, as the land of poets like Jami, Saib-e-Tabrizi, Hafela, Beydel and artifacts like the Bamiyan Buddhas and the land of “a thousand splendid suns”. This cultural richness of Afghanistan which echoes Jalil’s description of the heritage of Herat is offered as a contrast to the war torn present and to debunk a dominant monolithic Western perspective that sees Afghanistan as a land of persecution, tyranny, war and rubbles. While this is the depiction in A Thousand Splendid in The Kite Runner we see hidden structures of persecution in this exoticised setting, some belligerently pushed in our face like Assef others like Baba are nostalgically, covered up.

Similar problems surface in other portraits. The portrayal of Rasheed and the Taliban, like Assef as inhuman, savage, the “other” with not even a trace of goodness, seems to tend towards a Western more specifically American discourse that has created the binary opposition between an American self and the enemy (Islamic) other. In such discourses as Miriam Cooke points out the burka recalls the sati and the “gendered logic of empire”. Within this imperial logic the Afghan male is the savage other and Afghan women and children are hapless victims of this tyrant needing to be rescued from their men by the white American male. Thus she observes that Spivak’s “white man saving the brown woman from the brown man” is reworked in the Afghanistan context and “U.S. imperialism and capitalism disappears behind the veil of the woman’s victimization” (299).
No doubt, Hosseini does not privilege this western discourse and undermines this binary at different points. All Afghan men are not tyrants; several men are radical, compassionate, empowering women in an otherwise restrictive cultural system. Hakim and Mullah Faizullah for instance are cases in point. They not only belong to older and different generations but are also from different spaces. The former a university professor from Kabul and the latter a religious head from Herat champion woman’s education and advancement. If Hakim empowers Laila with education, Mullah Faizullah fortifies Mariam with prayer and faith and supports Mariam’s desire for a school education. In this portraiture Hosseini destabilizes the dominant construct of the misogynistic Afghan male, who is also belligerently “Islamic”, with his fundamentalism and misogyny fuelling each other. Further since in the novel’s schema women take the centre, though significant characters even these good male Afghan figures are kept in the periphery and women even if victimized draw strength from within and their sisterhood. It is also important to note the absence of white characters and America that occupied such a central space in *The Kite Runner*, in his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

But Washington is always there in the background. This loyalty to a host land appears through several silences in *A Thousand Splendid* while it is loudly palpable in *The Kite Runner*. Amir’s loyalties being obvious one can argue with Rushdie the “the point of view of the author is not necessarily that of the narrator”. But as Chinua Achebe says of another problematic text, Hosseini like Conrad does not offer us an alternative point to counter Amir’s American Dream discourse. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* this dream discourse recurs in a different strand. Though the text portrays the atrocities committed during the Mujahidin wars, America’s role in arming certain fundamentalist factions is silenced. While Rasheed does comment about how the CIA have armed the Mujahidin to the teeth, it is important to note that this comes from Rasheed , the arch villain of the text, the victimizer of the hapless. While benign figures like Hakim with his San Francisco Bridge T-Shirt imagines America as the land of plenty – a caring host land. However in his projection of Islam, Hosseini has steered clear of the Islamophobia of the west. In his good vs. bad narrative, he purposefully de-contextualises the bad from the religious space. While many of the victims like Mariam, Hassan and even Amir resort to prayer and their faith for strength and succour.

But in his latest novel *And the Mountains Echoed*, Hosseini’s exilic perspective has not only deepened but pans a wider space and time than his earlier novels. The panorama of human suffering is no longer restricted to the armed conflict or to Afghanistan but cut across time and space thus collapsing the earlier “double landscape”. Binaries can no longer be
strictly determined in the multiple stories Hosseini narrates, thus he attempts to capture through the dialectic of exile a dialogic world traversing across borders and boundaries.

Rahimi’s exilic perspective is plural rather than partial, offering not binaries but multiple angles in his two texts. Toward this he blurs all identities allowing a barrage of meaning to emerge in his texts His allegorical method is more postmodern narrating the allegory’s contingencies (possibility) and insufficiencies. Earth and Ashes, for instance, in Owen’s words, “agglomerates or accumulates” fragments in the reading of the allegory(75). Thus what is traditional, like naswar, or the apple blossom scarf representing Pashtunwali codes of masculine ethics, need not be glorious. In the distanced perspective of the exile all cultural-ethnic nationalisms rooted in ethics of revenge and counter-revenge seem problematic. The cyclical nature of the wars in Afghanistan is suggested in the privileging the open form of narrative than the closed. Further the host land, a hovering presence in Hosseini’s novel, never appears in Rahimi’s novels, since whether its Dastaguir or the woman, he chooses the perspective of the internally exiled.

Language the culture capital of a nation, an important site on which cultural nationalism is constructed becomes problematic in Rahimi’s texts. The purpose of writing Earth and Ashes, a saga of pain and loss in Dari and The Patience Stone, the powerful story of protest in French, his adopted language can like his texts be allegorically read. While the west disappears in Rahimi’s texts, western ideologies seep through. Many critics who have read the text in French record the strong influence of French feminism. But the contrapuntal element of Rahimi’s exile emerges when he narrates in French a novel that uses a Persian myth as a frame. Moreover, even if one were to argue that this is so in The Kite Runner as well, the woman more explicitly and powerfully chooses to protest within the systems that are trying to marginalize them. Though tending towards western feminism, Rahimi also shows an inclination towards Islamic Feminism that shows as Miriam Cooke comments, “a double commitment: to a faith position on the one hand, and to women’s rights both inside and outside the home on the other “(301). Rahimi’s plural and partial perspective as exile depicts the emergence of a new, complex self-positioning that celebrates multiple belongings. This identity is not a fixed identity but creates a new, contingent subject position. This location that Rahimi’s exilic perception creates is a radical act of subversion, since it confirms belonging in a religious community while allowing for activism on behalf of and with other women.

As a counter to limiting and restrictive ethnic nationalisms, Hosseini and Rahimi advocate alternative – cultural nationalism paradoxically rooted in rootless transnationalism.
Enacting a metaphorical transnationalism in exile, they deconstruct lines that divide and create binaries like us vs. them, dominator vs. dominated, the majority vs. minority. Thus in the exile’s imaginary transnational Afghanistan- Pashtuns are Hazaras half brothers, Lailas help in reconstructing a war ravaged land, the historically silenced find voice and protest through blood and body. Narrativising the stories of their war ravaged land in exile, Hosseini and Rahimi, like another thinker, seer and writer, raise this prayer for their land still in the throes of conflict that someday it be led into that “heaven of freedom” where strife has not broken up the nation into fragments, where a woman can emerge empowered and where reason is not lost in the desert sands of parochial codes and fundamentalist ideologies.